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#### Dr Euden Činč\*

Mihailo Palov Vocational Teachers' College, Vršac

# MELODIC LINKS BETWEEN SERBIAN AND ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHANT: EXAMPLES FROM WORKS BY STEVAN ST. MOKRANJAC AND DIMITRIE CUSMA

**Abstract:** Even though over the last century a number of researchers in the field of musicology have addressed the similarities between Serbian and Romanian (Banat) church music, i.e. chant, the topic has never been thoroughly investigated. On the one hand, this is probably due to the unavailability of sources and, on the other hand, perhaps also due to the language barrier. This paper is a modest contribution to more detailed research in the field, supported by concrete examples of similarities and shared elements in Serbian and Romanian church music in the former Metropolitanate of Karlovci, which are far less pronounced in other regions (in the practice of the Romanian Orthodox Church).

**Key words:** melodic flow, melodic and cadential formulae and configurations, modality.

Given the longevity and versatility of his career, Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac is perhaps the most significant figure of the Serbian musical past. As is well-known, Mokranjac dedicated much of his work to church, i.e. sacred music. His most prominent work is certainly the *Liturgija* [Divine Liturgy], arranged for a mixed choir, with variants for a women and children's choir. Even though it is rather mellifluous and easy to sing, Mokranjac's *Liturgy* is a perfect demonstration of his many compositional skills, standing out especially for its strong

<sup>\*</sup> Author contact information: eugencinci@gmail.com

ecclesiastic character. The fact that it still prevails in church practice today is irrefutable evidence of its worth. Apart from the *Liturgy*, one should also mention other works by Mokranjac with strong sacred features, written in adherence to the canons of the Church and thus often an indispensable part of services, i.e. liturgy, such as *Akatist Bogorodici*, *Tebe Boga hvalim*, *Opelo*, and many others.

Nevertheless, it is different area of Mokranjac's work that we find more interesting for our present purposes. A composer as well as a conductor, Mokranjac was a good judge and an expert in church singing. Mokranjac himself once mentioned that as a little boy, he attended church services, helping and singing from the choir loft. Mokranjac openly admitted that he had learnt to sing in church by ear, in the choir loft, whereas he formally studied sacred music only much later, paying special attention to certain rules of the *profession and science*. Most composers are not that fortunate and although their works may be sacred in character and command exceptional artistic value, they are often not well adjusted for use in church services.<sup>2</sup>

It is common knowledge that in his choral works Mokranjac used already familiar church melodies. His biographers, as well as Mokranjac himself, have said as much. However, it is usually difficult to find in his pieces entire melodic lines borrowed directly from chant. His borrowings are usually confined to individual phrases, motives, or a specific cadence. Nevertheless, in some of his pieces, Mokranjac used broad fragments of church melodies. As it turns out, when listening to them, one notes that they are very similar to certain melodies we find in Romanian churches in Banat. These similarities are noticeable not only in his choral works, but also when comparing the church singing of Banat with Mokranjac's source of inspiration, synthesised in his work *Oktoih*.<sup>3</sup>

One could argue that these similarities stem from our shared Byzantine past. That might be a logical explanation. But the problem therein is the fact that neither Banat church melodies nor their variants found in Mokranjac's works may be located in other parts of Romania. If the similarities indeed stem from our common Byzantine past, why do we only find them in Banat and the practice of the Serbian Orthodox Church? Instead, one should perhaps seek an explanation in the shared past and jurisdiction of Sremski Karlovci over the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Kosta Manojlović, *Spomenica Stevanu Stojanoviću Mokranjcu*, Belgrade, Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca,1923, 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Kosta Manojlović, op.cit., 123-126.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Eugen Cinci, *Eclesiastic și folcloric în cântarea de strană bănățeană* (The Eclesiastic and the Folk in Banat Church Singing), Bucharest, National University of Music, 2009, 66–67.

entire Orthodox population north of the Danube, a jurisdiction that existed for decades or even centuries. Or, maybe one should concentrate on the fact that the Serbs and Romanians studied church singing together. Finally, one might also want to take into account the oral transmission of chant from one generation to the next, which highly resembles the transmission of folk music. What is certain is that there are similarities; sometimes, they are obvious and sometimes, rather discrete.

In other words, that there is considerable common ground between Serbian Orthodox chant and Romanian chant in Banat seems beyond dispute. In the preface to his *Church Songs*, His Eminence Nicolae Corneanu, Archbishop of Timişoara and Metropolitan of Banat, confirms that the Romanian population living in Banat shares the same style and repertory of church singing with the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>4</sup>

Another piece of data, found in Serbian sources related to church singing, seems especially interesting. Namely, according to these sources, folk elements are easily recognizable in the practice of Serbian chant. Writing about the church songs that the composer transcribed, one of Mokranjac's famous biographers, Kosta Manojlović, suggested that Mokranjac had actually revealed the hidden psychological harmony of the people behind the music, enabling us to reflect on their ability to create such music.<sup>5</sup> In other words, through melody, ornaments, and other elements, folklore, i.e. folk music created by the people, had permeated not only the church music of the Romanians in Banat, but also that of the Serbian Orthodox Church. There is a variety of reasons behind this and they deserve special attention. What is significant to us here and now is that folk elements were a part of both Serbian and Romanian church music. Speculating, we might once again turn to the origins of the similarities mentioned above. In that case we might concentrate on the oral transmission of the music. Oral transmission went on until the church melodies were first written down by pioneers such as Mutibarić, Stanković, and Mokranjac on the Serbian side, and Terentius Bugariu, Trifon Lugojan, Atanasie Lipovan, etc. on the Romanian.<sup>6</sup> Even today, when there is a variety of collections of church music, oral tradition in learning has remained an omnipresent method of work.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Nicolae Belean, *Cântări bisericești* [Church Songs], Timișoara, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, 1995, 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Kosta Manojlović, op.cit., 123–126.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Euđen Činč [Eugen Cinci], *Zajedničke perikope u srpskom i rumunskom crkvenom pojanju* [Shared Pericopes in Serbian and Romanian Orthodox Chant]. Vršac, Visoka škola strukovnih studija za vaspitače, 2013, 39.

One of the most important books of collected Romanian church melodies from the region of Banat is Cântări bisericești (Church Songs), co-authored by Dimitrie Cusma, Ioan Teodorovici, and Gheorghe Dobreanu. The book appeared in 1980, published by the Metropolitanate of Banat in Timisoara. In his foreword to the book, Bishop Nicolae, to whom the collection was dedicated. pointed out several arguments in favour of creating one of the most significant collections of church music in Banat. Bishop Nicolae stresses the fact that for a long time, church singing was passed on to the next generation orally, even though various collections of church songs came into being only after 1900, such as the collections of Terentius Bugariu (1910), Trifon Lugojan (1929), Nicolae Firu (1933), and Atanasie Lipovan (1944 and 1946). The 1980 collection of church songs, recognisable by its distinctive black cover, comprises 383 pages and an appendix (Erratum), where the authors draw the reader's attention to errors made during the preparation of the book. The collection is very significant not only regarding research on church singing in Banat, but also church practice itself. Later collections, especially the one edited by Nicolae Belean and published by the Metropolitanate of Banat in Timişoara in 1995, is a continuation of the work of Belean's predecessors, although, of course, from a newer and more modern perspective. Belean's collection resulted from the need to complement and edit the existing collections in a new way.<sup>7</sup>

Examples of correspondences between Banat Orthodox chant and Serbian church music are easy to find. I have already highlighted some of them, i.e. the most representative ones. I will use Cusma, Teodorovici, and Dobreanu's collection *Cântări bisericești* as the basis of my analysis. I will base my analysis of Serbian church music on Mokranjac's choral works, above all his *Liturgy*, published in a collection prefaced by Vojislav Ilić, as well as church songs published in the second part of the same collection, issued in Belgrade in 1995. All of Mokranjac's settings that I will analyse are strictly homophonic and harmonized for a choir. Rather than impede, this will facilitate our understanding of Mokranjac's harmonized arrangements of church music. Knowing that Mokranjac's melodies have a solid base in chant, written down and edited by the composer, we can gain a clear and realistic view of Serbian Orthodox chant.

The first church song I will analyse, emphasising the similarities between Romanian chant in Banat and Serbian church music, is the so-called *Nedeljni aksion* (Sunday Axion). The version of the *Axion* practised in Romanian churches in Banat is on page 376 of *Cântări bisericeşti*. The song is in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Eugen Cinci, *Eclesiastic și folcloric, op.cit.*, 284–285.

fourth tone (or echos), typical for singing in a church. The Axion is often used as a model for learning to sing in the fourth tone, which is then applied to other texts. The melodic anchors are clearly the following: g', a', b'-flat, c', d", e", f", while e"-flat, though appearing twice, just like e", has no clear stability. There is one flat in the key signature and on the whole, the song centres around F. Given that F is the tonal centre, we might conclude that the melody begins and ends on the third note of its tonal structure, i.e. A (a'). The melodic line, especially the main one, is mostly ascending and shows the composer's exceptional skill. The melodic flow and the configuration of the notes constantly give the impression of the sublime, which fully adheres to the liturgical role of the Axion, dedicated to Virgin Mary, sung at one of the most significant moments of the Divine Liturgy, immediately after the hymn Tebe pojem [To Thee I Sing] and the Holy Eucharist. To recognize a given melodic turn or formula, it must be clearly stated. One may often identify the mode of a melody by the way it proceeds. In the case of the Axion, 8 several specific melodic formulae appear multiple times:

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1. b'-flat - c" - b'-flat - a' - g' (bars 3-4)

2. d" - e"-flat - d" - c" (bb. 22-23)

3. c" - b'-flat - a' - c" - b'-flat - a' - g' (bb. 16-17)

4. d" - e" - f" - d" - c" (bb. 42-43)
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Regarding the cadences, we must look at the melodic outline as a whole, not merely at the cadence itself. It is worth mentioning that the cadences consist of the following internal melodic formulae:

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1. c" - b'-flat - c" - a' (b. 8)
2. b'-flat - b'-flat - a' - b'-flat - c" - b'-flat - a' (bb. 26–28)
The Axion ends with the following formula: d" - c" - b'-flat - a' - b'-flat - c" - a'.
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One should bear in mind that there are also formulae that mark the end of a section in the text. As a rule, these formulae end on g'. As is typical for chant, the musical architecture of the *Axion* is governed by the text. As a consequence, the sectional makeup of the melody follows that of the text. The sections vary in length, ranging from several notes to the equivalent of several lines of text. The rhythm is not particularly demanding, comprising dotted minims, minims, crotchets, quavers, and semiquavers, and it tends to emphasise specific melodic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Dimitrie Cusma, Ioan Teodorovici, and Gheorghe Dobreanu, *Cântări bisericeşti*, Timi-şoara, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, 1980, 9–10.

formulae. The time signatures are 4/4, 3/4, and 2/4, following the logic of the text.<sup>9</sup>

When it comes to Mokranjac's use of the Axion in his Liturgy, the presence of F-sharp in the key signature orients the whole melody towards G. To highlight the similarities between the Banat version of the Axion and the one created by Mokranjac as clearly as possible, we must overcome the differences between their respective backgrounds. I am referring here to Mokranjac's soprano line, which actually involves a melody from the Octoechos. Regarding form, i.e. the elements of rhythm and metre, it seems that there are no differences between the Banat variant (so to speak) and Mokranjac's Axion. In both versions, the melody starts with a pickup and the time signature is arranged in the following scheme: 4/4, 3/4, and 2/4. As I already mentioned above, the melodic content of the Axion stems from the fourth tone; it is one of its melodic variants, if we rely on the terminology used by singers and authors of significant collections of church songs. The same melodic content, a model applied to other sacred texts, can be found in other church songs as well. One often finds the melodic model of the Axion in fourth-tone antiphons. Its presence in Serbian Orthodox chant demonstrates the vitality of the system of melodic models in these parts as well. In Mokranjac's case, one melodic model appears several times, in a number of his works, of course, always supported by a different text. Along with small variations, the melodic model is, as a rule, governed by the structure of the text.10

Another obvious similarity between Serbian and Romanian chant in Banat refers to the eighth church mode. The melodic model of the eighth-tone *Axion*, highly distinctive and easy to sing, had to be part of Mokranjac's arrangements. This melodic model may be found in the *kontakion* (Orthodox hymn) *So svjatimi*, which is sung during ceremonies in memory of the dead; Cusma, Teodorovici, and Dobreanu include it on page 346 of their collection of Romanian church songs.<sup>11</sup>

Aware of the beauty of the melodies of the eighth tone, Mokranjac often used them in his works. An example of this is the already mentioned *kontakion So svjatimi*, included in the collection *Sacred Music II*, page 9. Once again, we find it in the soprano line.<sup>12</sup> There are significant similarities between the Romanian and Serbian variants. The melody and for the most part the rhythmic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See Example I.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> See Example II.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Example III.

<sup>12</sup> Example IV.

flow are only two of the many elements that bring the two variants together. On the other hand, there are certain differences in the metre, since Mokranjac uses 4/4 and 3/4. However, the *kontakion So svjatimi* is not the only setting where Mokranjac used the eighth church mode. Another example is his setting of *Blagoslovlju Gospoda*.<sup>13</sup>

In 1935, a collection of songs was published in Belgrade under the title of Pravoslavno srpsko narodno crkveno pojanje - opšte pojanje (Traditional Serbian Orthodox Chant – General Chant), compiled by Mokranjac and edited and prefaced by Manojlović. The collection seems exceptionally interesting right from the beginning, that is, Manojlović's preface, which describes several significant moments from Mokranjac's creative past. The first part of the collection Osmoglasnik was published in Belgrade in 1908 under the auspices of the Saint Sava Divinity School. Related to this is a letter Mokranjac wrote to a bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church, asking him to use his authority to speed up the decision of the Church to publish the second part of the collection. When the Church finally decided not only to support Mokranjac, but also to retain full rights to his collection, the composer started work on it, which took 15 years. The manuscript saw the light of day in 1914, under the title of *Opšte crkveno pojanje* [General Church Chant]. The original was kept in the vault of the Metropolitanate. The outbreak of the First World War forced Bishop Danilo to flee Belgrade, taking Mokranjac's manuscript with him. In 1915, the manuscript was mentioned to be in Paraćin and later, a rumour had it buried near the Studenica monastery. Manojlović, a well-known figure from the Serbian musical past, who dedicated much of his work to the life and work of Mokranjac, tried to retrieve Mokranjac's manuscript after the war. He spent a long time at the monastery, especially its library, but unfortunately, in vain. The original was never recovered.<sup>14</sup>

The collection here at stake, i.e. the second part of *Pravoslavno srpsko narodno crkveno pojanje – opšte pojanje* [*Traditional Serbian Orthodox Chant – General Chant*] was published in 1935, after many difficulties. The first attempt to publish it had occurred in 1920, immediately after the First World War, when Manojlović, who was Professor at the Divinity School at the time, wrote an editorial note and published the collection according to an already existing variant of 1914. In 1925, the state printing house began publishing musical scores, which enabled Mokranjac's work to be published in a modern edition. Finally, after a number of attempts, carefully supervised by Manojlović, the first volume of the second part of *Pravoslavno srpsko narodno crkveno pojanje* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Example V.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Euden Činč, *Zajedničke perikope,op. cit.*, 29–30.

- *opšte pojanje* was published in 1935. This is the collection that will be in focus in the remaining few pages of this paper. <sup>15</sup>

For a successful analysis of the church songs collected by Mokranjac and carefully prepared for publication by Manojlović and a proper comparative study of these songs and songs appearing in other similar collections such as those of the Romanian Orthodox Church, we must pay due attention to Manojlović's editorial. Manojlović expresses his deep respect for Mokranjac's work, which he goes on to prove by the great care and attention he pays to the elder composer's collection of songs, an attempt, according to Manojlović, to check the constant evolution of church, i.e. sacred music. The changes to which Serbian Orthodox chant was prone at the time had produced a number of variants. In his edition of Mokranjac's collection, Manojlović also included variants transcribed by other authors, in addition to Mokranjac's transcriptions. These variants appear in smaller type and many songs appear in two or more versions. They include variants written down by Kornelije Stanković, Gavrilo Boljarić, Nikola Tajšanović, Tihomir Ostojić, Petar Kostić, Jefta Petrović, Jovan Kozobarić, Joco Pajkanović, Dimitrije Stojačić, and Lazar Terzin, among others. These variants often depart in significant ways from those supplied by Mokranjac, showing the powerful influence of oral tradition and dissemination of chant. Regarding connections between Serbian and Romanian chant, that is, in our case, between the respective collections of Mokranjac on the one hand and Kuzma, Teodorovici, and Dobreanu on the other, one notices some rather significant similarities right at the beginning. On page 1 of Mokranjac's collection, there is a melodic model that is rather similar to a model featured in the Romanian collection called *Podobija*. This is a second-tone model. Although in his transcription Mokranjac used four flats, whereas his Romanian colleagues used only one, some similarities are still easy to observe. In both cases there is a characteristic ascending fourth (a' - d" in the Romanian collection and a'-flat – d'-flat in Mokranjac's). The distinct cadential pattern of the Romanian model (b'-flat -a' - b'-flat -c'' - a') is also found in Mokranjac's version (b'-flat – a'-flat – b'-flat – c" – a'-flat), although, of course, in a different functional context. Regarding the context, we can say that the endings are rather similar: b'-flat - c'' - a' in the Romanian version and b'-flat - c'' - a'-flat in Mokranjac's version. The difference in the functional context notwithstanding, it is obvious that both versions are similarly inclined to a particular tonal centre.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Stevan Mokranjac, *Pravoslavno srpsko narodno crkveno pojanje – opšte pojanje*, Belgrade, Državna štamparija Kraljevine Jugoslavije, 1935.

On page 14 of his collection, Mokranjac uses another melodic model that has its counterpart in Romanian Banat chant: the sixth-tone *troparion*. Whereas Mokranjac used a single b-flat in his key signature, Cusma, Teodorovici, and Dobreanu also used a g-flat, furnishing their version of the chant with a special colouring. Nonetheless, there are noticeable similarities in both versions. For instance, Mokranjac's version begins with f' - g' - a', close enough to f' - g'-sharp - a' of in Romanian version. In both cases, the final cadence ends on A. In both versions, the tonal centre is F. In Mokranjac's version, the configuration g' - a' - b'-flat - a' appears at a number of places, which is a typical ending formula in Banat. As for the Romanian version, what seems rather interesting and deserves our attention is the appearance of G-sharp in the key signature. This may be due to the oral transmission of these church songs in the past. It is unlikely that it was present in the Serbian variant and then simply disappeared from it. Both versions feature a modest melodic range: f'-d'' (Mokranjac) and f'-c'' (Cusma *et al.*).

On page 24 of Mokranjac's collection, there is a melodic model that resembles seventh-tone melodies as they appear in Romanian ecclesiastic sources in Banat. For instance, the beginning of *Doamne Strigat-am*, included in the Romanian collection on page 170, features melodic content similar to that offered by Mokranjac. The key signature is the same in both cases (a single b-flat), as well as the first cadence (a'-g'-a'-f'). Both melodies are centred around F and share the same final melodic configuration, ascending from D through A. In both melodies, the very ending (f'-g'-a'-f') is melodically identical. The opening E in Mokranjac's version should not confuse us, as it probably resulted from the evolution of church songs and the influence of oral tradition. The melodic content is indisputably rather similar in both songs.

Although over the years a number of scholars have addressed the relations and connections between the Romanians and the Serbs, as well as social, political, and cultural life in the states they have inhabited (Romania, the Habsburg Monarchy, Austria-Hungary, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, Yugoslavia, and Serbia), their musical connections have not been addressed to a similar extent. In that regard, similarities between Romanian church music in Banat and Serbian church music, which share many points of contact, have remained marginalized in musicological approaches.

Their common Byzantine heritage, the course of historical events that shaped the context whereby the Romanians and Serbs living north of the Danube occupied similar positions in the political hierarchies of the time, and their similar social circumstances may only partially explain evident similarities

between their respective church music traditions. Research has confirmed the existence of similarities between Romanian Orthodox chant in Banat and Serbian church music, personified chiefly by Mokranjac. But one should search for similarities not only in musical, that is, melodic configurations, but also in their powerful spiritual and emotional plenitude, the beauty of the music of the two nations, which certainly pertains to the One to whom it is dedicated.

## Example I



## Example II



## Example III



#### Example IV



<sup>\*)</sup> Може се певати алтернативно уместо претходног *Co свјатими у g-mollu* (стр. 6)
This *With the Saints* may be sung alternatively instead of the foregoing one in *G minor* (р. 6)

## Example V

# ΕΛΑΓΟGΛΟΒΛΙΌ ΓΟΘΠΟΔΑ

#### БЛАГОСЛОВЉУ ГОСПОДА | I WILL BLESS

