

The Carpatho-Rusyn Prostopinije Chant System

The Carpatho-Rusyn (CR) prostopinije is a system of chant melodies from a variety of sources and patterns. The system includes a number of eight tone cycles, each of which is proper to certain classes of hymns within the divine office. The system also includes specific melodies for certain pieces and a system of intonation and reading tones for other texts. These are also layered then with special melodies within each sub-system and then variants on the chant by region or even parish practice.

In short, the entire liturgical service is a sung dialog between the clergy and the people. The melodies used for each text are not random or even open to creative composition. They all have a proper family of melodies that should be used only for that purpose.

Finally, the prostopinije system is so called because it is “plain chant” of the people. This system of chant is specifically designed for congregational use and not for the performance by assigned “expert” singers. There are pieces here and there that are assigned to individual roles and not the congregation, but by and large this chant is all about broad participation and not listening.

Ekphoneses

These are the simple chants of the clergy passed down in the oral tradition. They are used by the deacons, priests and bishops for the intonation of their prayers in the office. These prayers are frequently longer paragraph style compositions that require a quick and flexible chant to avoid becoming labored or unintelligible.

The clergy must also be attentive to the pitch chosen for these chants as this pitch is used by the cantor to set the responses sung in an appropriately compatible key. The services are essentially a dialog between the clergy and the people. So the chanting back and forth needs to flow smoothly and not be tonally different. The clergy set this pitch.

Scripture Reading Chants

When scripture readings are taken during the services they are chanted to simple pattern also passed on in the oral tradition. The deacon or priest does this for the reading from the gospel while readings from the other NT books and OT readings belong to the reader. In the CR tradition the reader is frequently also the cantor but technically these are separate roles.

There are a number of variations on the theme but they all follow this same pattern.

- A complete two part phrase for the announcement of the reading name and author
- An opening appellation for the reading specific to category of book
- An alternating A and B phrase that continues through the course of the reading
- A concluding chant that marks that the reading is over

Psalm Tones

The reading of complete or large sections of Psalms is a major part of much of the divine office. When taking large sections from the Psalms there are a number of chants passed on in the oral tradition. These

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are all composed of an alternating A and B phrase that simply repeats through the course of the Psalm.

In the CR tradition there are two “standard” tones one from Uzhorod and the other from Presov. There is also lenten tone for fast periods and a tone specific to the reading of Psalm 50. Psalm 50 is taken during matins and included in most morning prayer rituals. There is also a set of three Psalm tones that are used when taking the kathisma Psalms. Each kathisma is divided into three stations and each station is assigned a Psalm tone.

Assigned Melodies

Much of the texts in the divine office have particular melodies assigned to them in the prostopinije system. They may have only one which is always used for this text or they might have a small variety that can be used for that text.

Podoben

Within much of the eight tone system collections there are special melodies that are associated with particular feasts where they first occur. These are then model melodies that are assigned to texts in other related celebrations and referred to as *podoben* meaning “the same as”. We find many of these same texts are designated as model melodies in the broader Greek and other Slav traditions as well. But the actual melodies used across traditions can be different.

This same concept of *podoben* melodies is adopted in a unique way in the CR prostopinije. There are composed “signature” hymns for a number of feasts during the liturgical year. These hymns are typically sung then to open the services on the feast day and at paraliturgical events during the season of the feast. The hymn is thus intimately associated with the festal celebration. As a result of this association the CR prostopoinje uses these same hymn melodies for the Cherubic hymn during the festal period. And in all cases whatever melody is used for the Cherubic hymn is also used for the communion Psalm at the distribution.

Variants

Many of these melodies come with variant versions. The chant communities are isolated by region and even villages in the old country. This leads to minor and major variations on how the chant is sung. In fact, the introduction to the Bokshai *prostopinije* tells us that the desire to have a basic set of common chant that all of the eparchy could sing as one was a driving factor in creating this volume in 1906.

The Eight Tone Systems

The bulk of the variable texts in the divine office are sung to one of the groupings of eight tone systems. Which set of eight tones is used depends on the type hymnography. Each tone system section listed below provides a bulleted list of which texts are sung to this series of tones. The eight tone system is common to all the Byzantine liturgical traditions but the actual melodies used for the tones differs among each ethnic subgroup.

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There are eight tones in symbolism for the “eighth day” of the week, the day of resurrection. In the patristic tradition God begins a “new creation” with the resurrection of Christ on Sunday, the eighth day of the week. Thus the number eight is a symbol of the resurrection.

We use the cycle of eight tones one per week starting with the Sunday services (Saturday evening vespers). This cycle starts after Pentecost and runs through till the next years Great Fast. There are common texts then for each tone and each day of the week contained in the Octoechos (eight tones) books. These same melodies are also assigned to specific texts of festal days that can occur anytime within the eight tone cycle.

Tone designations can occur in two main ways. The text may be simply labeled “Tone 2” and then based on the type of text you know which tone 2 applies. Texts are also commonly labeled with the incipit of the corresponding text in the tone that this is sung. So for a tropar our tone 2 might be called “Jehda snishil jesi.” But this method is more commonly used to designate podobn assignments within tones. The chant books contain then these tone model melodies that are used as the example to apply to all texts assigned to that tone.

In the CR Prostopinije system, these melodies are all built on flexible patterns that can be easily adapted to a wide variety of texts. This same type of pattern based system is what is common throughout the Slav communities but they each tend to have their own collections of these melodies. The Greek tonal system is based on poetic structures and the hymns in Greek are composed to those same structures so that the melodies will fit. In prostopinije these are the basic structural elements found in all of these tone system melodies.

- Introductory phrase (not always present)
- Alternating sets of phrases for the text variations from 1 to 5 but mostly just 2
- Concluding phrase

Resurrectional Eight Tones

- Divine Liturgy—Tropar & Kondak
- Matins—The Lord is God
- Matins—Alleluia
- Matins—Sessional Hymns

There are also podobn melodies within this system associated with special feasts. These are included along with the regular melodies in the chant volumes. Astute observers will notice that in four of these eight resurrectional tones the kondak is sung to a different melody than the tropar. These are an example of how the special melodies work in the resurrectional tone system. Each of these four are actually an application where a podobn melody became the standard kondak melody for the entire tone.

Tone 3—Nativity of the Lord Diva dnes

Tone 4—Theophany of the Lord Javilsja jesi

Tone 6—Flowery Sunday (Palm Sunday) Na prestol'i na nebesi

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Tone 8—Pascha Asche ivo hrob

Prokeimenon/Alleluia Eight Tones

- Prokeimena
- Divine Liturgy—Alleluia
- Matins—Let everything that breathes
- Matins—Holy is the Lord

These texts are all in the format of a primary Psalm text with one or more Psalm verses. The primary text is then sung first and repeated again after each verse. The verse belongs to the reader while the cantor sings the primary text with the congregation.

Samohlasen Eight Tones

- Vespers—stichera at Psalm 140
- Vespers & Matins—aposticha
- Matins—stichera at Psalm 50
- Matins—stichera at the praises

This system also has frequent podobn special melodies that are associated with particular feasts. These are located in the chant books inside the samohlasen tone section. These are also applied frequently to the “our father” sung at the Divine Liturgy.

Bolhar Tones

- Vespers—stichera at litija
- Funerals—hymns of St. Damascus (Hymns of farewell)

Incomplete set in the CR tradition which generally preserve only tones 1, 2, 4 & 5 in most books. Ratsin also has tone 6.

Irmosi Tones

- Matins—irmos & katavasia
- Divine Liturgy—Festal velichia to the Mother of God

The matins irmosi frequently have special melodies for particular feasts.

Broader Znammeny Tradition

In addition to the 8 tone systems noted so far, there are two additional ones in the broader Znammeny

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tradition. These are not used in the prostopinije books or practice but are found in other slavic chant systems. When these are rarely encounters among the CR practices they will come from the Lvov publications.

Dogmatika Tones

- Vespers—Dogmatikon

The dogmatikon is the final stichera hymn taken after the theotokion during the vespers hymns at Psalm 140. These are added to the cycle only on saturday evening or certain assigned feasts. The CR prostopinije tradition just applies the samohlasen tones used for all the other hymns at these times.

Stepenna Tones

- Matins—Hymns at the Psalms of ascent

These hymns during the Psalms of ascent are taken to the resurrectional tones in the CR prostopinije system.

Acknowledgments

I have learned all of the above by the good fortune of great teachers. This description is a composite of notes over the decades from all of these chant experts in alphabetical order. From them is the source of all the good information but any mistakes are my own.

Jerry Jumba

Msgr.. Alexis Mihalic

Fr. Elias O'Brian Carm.

Fr. Joseph Raptosh

J. Michael Thompson

Fr. Donald Valasek