
DEFENDED DOCTORAL THESES

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**Аспекти великог појања у контексту
српске православне црквене музике
(The Aspects of Great Chant in the
Context of Serbian Orthodox
Church Music)¹**

As the essence of the liturgy expresses through unity with a strictly defined dramaturgy of symbolism, the polarity of the phenomenological aspects of the basic types of chanting in the Serbian Orthodox Church, the syllabic short and melismatic great chanting, proves to be a factor of their complementarity, and regarding their roles in the liturgy, these two types of hymns generate an inextricable interrelationship. Also, by the disruption of the service dynamics, through the lack of melismas where they are envisaged by patristics, the intermediary role of musical symbols between the believer and the divine is violated. However, unlike the short chanting, whose con-

tinuity in practice has not been interrupted and up to now was studied systematically, melismatic songs are – due to the highly demanding interpretation and structural complexity – almost completely ostracized from current practice and neglected in the field of scientific research. From the standpoint of national cultural identity, the consequences are unethical, because the highly aesthetic values of the national church music tradition are left to oblivion.

Since, as a result of multi-year affinities towards the aesthetics of church music of Byzantine provenance, Nataša Dimić realized the existence of a hybrid-type of songs – those that cannot be directly categorized in either one of the two basic types of Serbian Orthodox Church musical expression, syllabic and melismatic – the need arose for filling the void, so far non-existent, with a comprehensive scientific picture of a corpus of so-called *recent Serbian church folk chanting*. Therefore, Nataša Dimić conceived her PhD on the methodologically precise verification of identity, the definition of the types of interrelationships and multidisciplinary contextualization – liturgical-patristic, cultural, sociological, historiographical – of all those chants which are not based solely on (syllabic) melodies of the *Osmoglasnik*, and with an accent on the great chant.

Thus, the text of this doctoral thesis is based on three extensive chapters: “The

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Theological-Philosophical Aspect”, “The Cultural-Historical Aspect” and “The Musical Aspect.”

The chapter “The Theological-Philosophical Aspect” offers a theoretical overview of the key terms, such as: beauty, art, aesthetics, aestheticization, canon and creativity. During the consideration of these terms, attitudes of the philosophy of art and Christian thinkers were “crossed”. The author gives special importance to the consideration of some essential questions: what is the position of art in the Church and canon settings? Does utilitarianism, when it comes to great chant, “withdraw” before some other “moments”, such as aesthetic pleasure, creative expression and musical imagination? Then, what justifies creating and practicing extremely melismatic church chanting? In order to provide the answer to these questions Nataša Dimić begins from the biblical writings, and then discusses in detail the attitudes of the Christian fathers continuously from the 1st century AD to the zenith of the Byzantine Empire in the 15th century. Attention was paid to the issues of beauty and art in Orthodoxy in the post-Byzantine period, where the author especially deals with the concept of “music theurgy”, present in contemporary Russian musicological literature. At the end of the chapter dedicated to the theological and philosophical aspects, Nataša Dimić pointed out that church art, and thus the great chant, has a prayer, edifying and sanctifying roles.

The next chapter, “The Cultural-Historical Aspect,” provides information on the influences of cultural, educational and historical circumstances on great chant. Firstly the “Cultural and historical circumstances in the development of recent Serbian church

chanting” were considered, identifying the circumstances in society that could influence the development of Serbian church music: wars, daily life, and church events. Hence, the textual segment “The Karlovci Metropolitanate in the 18th and 19th century,” which sheds light on general church circumstances in the period of expansion of great chanting. The author also directs her scientific attention to the history of Serbian education in the 18th and 19th century, and the potential impacts that the manner of education could have had on the history of the great chant. Given the fact that the Serbian church dignitaries at certain historical stages acted as secular leaders, they brought Russian and Greek teachers who left a significant imprint on Serbian culture.

Nataša Dimić has also conducted a detailed comparison of Serbian sacral architecture and fresco painting with great chanting. By considering the potential stylistic influence of the Baroque and, to a much lesser extent, Classicism, on great chant, she noted some analogies. Especially important and original observations are those concerning the non-compliance of monumental Baroque bell towers with the other buildings in the churchyard and the excessive length of hymns in great chant compared to other chants during the church service.

In fresco painting, the styles of western European and Byzantine art were intertwined, as much as – as assumed – these were represented in great chanting. The Baroque, probably through the indirect effects on chanting, could contribute to increasing the level of melismaticity of the already richly developed, late Byzantine melody, while Classicism could influence the modifications of the chant microstructure.

In the third and most extensive section, “The Musical Aspect,” the musical characteristics of great chanting were considered through a large number of authentic scientific prisms. Firstly, an “Overview of musical anthologies with chants of great chanting” was presented, noting that, despite the neglect of this kind of chanting in practice, the number of existing musical anthologies containing great chant is very large. There are about 34 anthologies and manuscripts of Serbian church chants, beginning with medieval hymns from the 15th century, all the way to the *Pentikostar* of Branko Cvejić, published in 1973. Given that Tihomir Ostojić and Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac, unlike other collectors, were also occupied with a scientific examination of church singing, Nataša Dimić also discussed their relation to the great hymns.

The author then systematized and summarized the results of her meticulous analytical insights. On this occasion, the original definition of a great chant has been offered, which is worth quoting in full: “It is an extremely melismatic to syllabic chanting, with its peculiar constructional features, which may, but need not belong to any of the eight church voices, and whose voice properties differ from those in the short chanting.” Then, the “Categorization of chants to church singing voices; the division according to the manner of chanting,” was considered, outlining a critical review of erroneous or free interpretations of categorizing great chants to the church singing voice, due to the absence of the well-known fact that great chant, as well as short chant, may be classified according to the “manners” of chanting.

The author also devoted considerable space to structural aspects of the chants.

Namely, the hymns are composed of formulas forming sections, while the sections are stacked as a mosaic constituting a great church song. Finally, the insights into the melodic properties of great chanting were presented, so in the chants of great chanting significantly higher ambituses were established than in short chanting hymns, as well as a large number of alterations. Through a meticulous analysis of hymns, Nataša Dimić found that the melody in great chanting, although perceptively dominating the liturgical text, however, does not disturb the understanding of its meaning. The chantors have traditionally taken care of the understandability of the text despite the developed melody. They did not hesitate from splitting the words into syllables, extending the syllables to a number of bars, permuting the syllables or other interventions, but after such alterations, those words, whose understanding was impaired, were clearly sung in their entirety.

By addressing the chances for the musical systematization of great chanting, as well, Nataša Dimić analyzes the categories of Serbian chants created by different authors (Nenad Barački, Branko Cvejić, Petar Bingulac, Vojislav Ilić), while noting that not everyone has given the same importance to great chanting. For this reason, the author attached the table listing all the chants of great chanting that can be found in the music anthologies. After comparing Serbian chants with Greek classifications of church hymns, Nataša Dimić challenged the traditional thinking that great chanting completely originates from papadic melos, and concluded that Serbian seating melos originates from the post-Byzantine irmo-logical melos.

Attention is also paid to the mutual combinations of melos (manners of chanting), on the one hand, and sub-manners (manners of chanting within great chant), on the other hand, which led to the creation of “hybrid forms of hymns” in church music, as pointed out.

In the subsection “Points of contact of two forms of chanting are opposite in polarity: syllabic and melismatic. In Mutibarić’s revision”, the author offers a review of the question of the redaction which was, according to historical sources, carried out by Jerotej Mutibarić in the first half of the 19th century. In this context, Nataša Dimić considered the problem of bordering forms of chanting, which cannot be classified either as great or short chanting.

Innovative scientific procedures in connection with great chanting were presented also in the section “Evolutionary phases of great chanting and interventions of chanters’ creativity in the genesis of the chant.” Completely authentically, several potential chronological phases were suggested in the evolution of great chanting: older generic (the late Byzantine) phase, dating from the 13th century to the beginning of the Turkish dominance in Serbia (late 15th century); the younger generic phase, from the beginning of the Turkocracy until the time when Stefan Stratimirović, who ordered compressing melismatic hymns, was the Metropolitan, and the third, degenerative phase, which runs from Stefan Stratimirović to modern times.

Considering the “similarities and differences in the creation of hymns of great and short chanting,” the author notes a certain incongruence between short and great chanting.

In the final segment of the chapter dedicated to the music features of great chanting, Nataša Dimić devoted her attention to one of the “leitmotif” topics for researchers of Serbian chanting: how did the assimilation of folk elements into religious hymns occur, and how can they be identified? The possible solution offered is very pragmatic, through a comparison of the “*Kaluđer* song” (Monk song) and the Communion song *Hvalite* (Praise), following the melody of the “*Kaluđer* song,” recorded by Kosta Manojlović after the chanting of Lazar Terzin. As the author points out, the chanter chose the secular song for modification which in structure corresponds to the traditional form of the chant *Hvalite* (Praise), bringing the changes in tempo, rhythmic pulse, and also a variation of individual notation values in order to achieve a logical accentuation of words. An almost “microscopic” detailed analysis carried out by Nataša Dimić showed all the subtleties of the subtle interventions that were carried out during the genre transformation of the song.

In the “Conclusion” the author summarizes the most significant contributions of the doctoral dissertation: redefining the traditional division of Serbian church music and the proposed solution to the problem of the relationship between great and short chanting, on the one hand, and great chanting and folk songs, on the other; considering great chanting in consultation with patristics, the history of architecture and fresco painting; setting up a scientific basis for future research. In this context, Nataša Dimić also “announced” some – very provocative – topics related to future scientific considerations of great chanting.