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Editors

Bojana Krsmanović, Ljubomir Milanović

Assistant Editor

Bojana Pavlović

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Thomas Arentzen

University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway;
thomas.arentzen@teologi.uio.no

Derek Krueger

University of North Carolina, Department of Religious Studies,
Greensboro NC, United States;
Kruegerd@uncg.edu

Romanos in Manuscript: Some Observations on the Patmos Kontakarion

A two-volume kontakarion at the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos is the most important witness to the works of Romanos the Melodist, the great sixth-century hymnographer. The kontakarion, executed by a single Middle Byzantine scribe, consists of two codices, Patmos 212 (P) and 213 (Q), which contained a repertoire of kontakia for the entire liturgical year. The first volume (288 folios) assigns hymns to the cycle of fixed feasts; the second (153 folios), hymns for the moveable cycle, covering the same period as the Middle Byzantine Triodion and Pentekostarion. Because of missing leaves, P lacks the period from 1 September to 6 October and from 6 to 31 August; and Q begins with Apokreos Sunday and ends on the Tuesday of Pentecost.

The last philologist to have worked extensively on the manuscript seems to have been José Grosdidier de Matons in the 1960's. He dated P and Q to the eleventh century and proposed that they were either written in Constantinople or in the monastic settlements on Mt. Latros in Bythina in Asia Minor. The latter assumption accords with the fact that Christodoulos Latrinos (d. 1093), who founded the Patmos monastery in 1088, had been abbot of the Laura tou Stylou on Mt. Latros before he came to the island, and that P includes a commemoration of St. Paul of Latros, who died in 955 (Grosdidier de Matons 1977: 70). In another manuscript, Paris. gr. 598 of the mid-tenth century, there is a note by a later hand that the abbot of the Laura tou Stylou on Mt. Latros, Christodoulos, fled to Patmos carrying with him as many books as he could. More importantly, Christodoulos himself says that he built the Patmos library from books he sent via Constantinople (see Papaioannou 2015: 266–70). Based on a comparison with other manuscripts ascribed to Bythina, the paleographer Nadezhda Kavrus-Hoffmann has proposed to us that the manuscript was executed in the second half of the tenth century, not in Constantinople, but in a provincial monastery, perhaps in Bythina. Thus Mt. Latros, being closely connected to Constantinople, is *not* an unlikely place of origin. We shall proceed following Kavrus-Hoffmann's judgment.

The manuscript is one of a small number of manuscripts (8 by our count) dating from the tenth to twelfth century attesting a similar arrangement of hymns over the liturgical calendar (Mass and Trypanis, *Cantica*, xxvi–xxvii; Grosdidier de Matons, *Hymnes* 1:24–32). This would suggest that the Kontakarion was a service book necessary for the performance of some form of Middle Byzantine service, to which P and Q are the richest witness. The importance of the Patmos kontakarion for our knowledge of Romanos is stark. Among surviving kontakaria, it is not only one of the earliest; it is also the most comprehensive one. In total, P and Q contain some 379 compositions, mostly complete, although some are fragmentary. The manuscript also includes 4 preludes without

additional stanzas (Grosdidier de Matons 1977: 70). When it comes to Romanos, these two codices include the most complete collection of hymns attributed to the Melodist, both those regarded by scholars as genuine and those whose authorship has been doubted. More than half (56%) of the kontakia in Q are attributed to Romanos; his name dominates the moveable cycle. Of the 59 kontakia regard by P. Mass and C. A. Trypanis as genuine, 56 are extant in P and Q. Of these, 23 are found *only* in this manuscript. This means that the critical editions of nearly 40% of Romanos's undisputed compositions are entirely based on what we can read in P and Q. Seven additional full kontakia from P and Q are found only in truncated versions in other manuscripts, making the Patmos manuscript the only witness to these hymns in their complete form. Were it not for P and Q, in other words, half of the corpus of Romanos would be completely unknown to us. Only three undisputed hymns are lacking in P and Q—*On the Nativity of the Virgin* (35), *On the Beheading of John* (38), and *On All Martyrs* (59) (according to the numbering and the judgment in the Oxford edition). Their absence can be explained by the fact that the first and last parts of the codices are missing. Furthermore, of the thirty or so poems regarded as *dubia* by Maas and Trypanis, the Patmos codices contain 24. Three of these are attested only here. For another 15, only Patmos contains most or all of the hymn.

The kontakion was originally a poem of one prelude (or *prooimion*, called *koukoulion* in the manuscript, e.g. Q f. 93r) and a set of usually between 15 and 25 stanzas (called *oikoi*, Q f. 32v). Many were later truncated, often to between three and eight stanzas. We do not know the details of this development, but the process of truncation had apparently already begun when a scribe wrote the Patmos kontakarion, as he included some kontakia in truncated versions. Other kontakaria, such as Sinai 925 of the tenth century, contain mostly truncated versions. In a separate development kontakia were truncated more severely, to their prelude and the first stanza, to be intercalated between the sixth and seventh odes of the kanon hymn during the Morning Prayer (*orthros*) in the later Byzantine rite. Overall, about 740 kontakia survive from the Byzantine period, if we count also those that have survived in a truncated form. This means that about half of all the kontakia we know of from the Byzantine world are included in these two Patmos volumes, many of them in their most extensive forms.

Given the significance of P and Q for Romanos studies and for the study of the kontakion as a genre, we traveled to Patmos in October of 2015 to examine the manuscript. We sought to understand what the manuscript could tell us about the transmission, presentation, and performance of Romanos's poems some 400 years after they had been composed. We wondered about their inclusion and arrangement in a service book. Was the kontakarion intended to provide liturgical pieces for a Middle Byzantine ritual office? To what extent can the kontakarion be taken as a witness to such an office? Our observations here are preliminary. We hope to publish a more complete study in the future.

The Presentation of the Hymns in the Manuscript

A number of features of the visual presentation of the hymns in the manuscript merit remark. The treatment of Romanos's hymn *On the Nativity I* (1; P f. 121r and ff.) is typical. A heading gives the date, 25 December. Indeed running heads throughout the manuscript indicate the date or feast for the hymn beginning on any particular page. This makes it easy for a reader to navigate in the book and find the right page in the course of the liturgical year. *On the Nativity I*'s beginning is articulated by a narrow horizontal geometric pattern with vegetable leaves, perhaps ivy, at its ends.

After an ornamental asterisk, the scribe gives the “title” of the hymn, or rather an indication of what the hymn is about or what feast it is for, in open majuscules filled in with red, using some conventional abbreviations: “Kontakion of the Holy and Most Sacred Nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The following line, in regular uncials, supplies the acrostic (“bearing the acrostic..”), which contains the author’s name, followed by an indication of the musical mode (*echos*). In most cases, these are followed by an indication either that the hymn has its own melody (*idiomelon*, e.g. P f. 123v) or is to be sung to a preexisting tune, which is indicated by its opening words. The latter is most common. There is no other musical notation. In this the kontakarion resembles Triodion manuscripts of the same era such as Sinai gr. 734 and 735.

The prelude and subsequent stanzas are written in paragraphs, not colometrically by verse. This is normal in Byzantine liturgical manuscripts. The divisions between kola are indicated with a raised dot. The grouping of paired kola into verses of two or three kola each is an invention of modern editors and not evident in the manuscript. The refrain is usually indicated by the combination of signs similar to a modern colon and a dash, both before and after it. Thus the metrical units and the shape of the stanza would be clear to an experienced performer. The refrain does not begin on a new line of text, but appears in uncials, slightly more spaced apart in most instances. Any left over space after the refrain is not filled with text, but simply ornamented, in this case with three crosses, to fill out the line. (Elsewhere the scribe prefers clusters of four dots and or a horizontal tilde-like dash. [See P f. 287r.]) The subsequent stanzas are indicated with large initial letters in open majuscule (usually filled in with color) that protrude into the left margin. In this manner, the acrostic comprising the initial letters of each stanza is clearly visible on the page. Further out in the margin, to the left of these letters, the stanzas are numbered. In contrast to the prelude and refrain, the text of the stanzas appears in a legible cursive. When the refrain returns, the scribe uses uncials once again. As the poem progresses, the refrains are often abbreviated. The scribe uses all the space left on the line, sometimes extending into the right margin, but never using a new line to continue the refrain text.

Yellow highlighting inconsistently decorates the capital letters of the prelude’s opening and the acrostic, and occasionally the stanza numbers. Some capitals are filled in in red (see P f.187r). In many cases the yellow highlighting extends to the title, musical indication, and refrain (loc. cit.). It is our impression that the use of color increases for some more important festivals, but this is in no way systematic. Easter, for example, receives no special treatment.

The system, consistent in P and Q, for distinguishing the prelude and the refrain in uncials while the rest of the hymn is written in cursive is obviously a Middle Byzantine innovation, a method of articulating the structure of the poetry with varied lettering styles dependent on the ninth-century invention of cursive script. That said, the Vienna papyrus fragment of the hymn *On the Three Children* (46.5), Pap. Gr. Vind. 29430 dated 600-650, transmits the poem with similar dots to indicate rhythmical units (kola), and employs a comma to set the refrain off from the rest of the stanza. It also abbreviates the refrain (Zuntz 1965). Another papyrus, containing the prelude and part of the first stanza of *On the Nativity II*, P. Amst. I 24 of the sixth or seventh century, also runs the metrical units together (Brunner 1993). The use of uncials and cursive in the Patmos manuscript articulates the structure of the poem, particularly in cuing the refrain. The uncials probably indicate that refrains were sung by the whole congregation. The use of uncials in the prelude, however, probably does not suggest congregational or choral performance of these parts of the text.

Romanos's *On Mary at the Cross* (19; Q f. 95v-98r) is an important Holy Week kontakion, a dialogue between Christ and his Mother at the cross. In the Patmos manuscript the hymn receives a distinctive and unique treatment: Q bestows alone on this kontakion markings in the margins signaling who speaks, either the mother (*Theotokos*) or the son (*Despotes*). These character names appear in the same ink as the main text; they may have been written by the same scribe in a different moment. Although a great many kontakia composed by Romanos depend on dialogue between biblical or mythic characters, only this one contains such explicit visual indication of alternating voice. It is unclear what this might tell us about performance, whether in this one instance the kontakion was to be sung by alternating cantors, or whether a single cantor was to modulate the voice—a technique which would have been useful also in any number of other hymns.

One poem not by Romanos that receives special adornment is the lengthy acrostic hymn which today is normally named the *Akathistos for the Mother of God*. In the manuscript it is simply labeled “a kontakion for the Annunciation,” and it is assigned to 25 March. Romanos's *On the Annunciation* comes after it, and is referred to as “another kontakion on the Annunciation.” The manuscript's designation of the *Akathistos* as a kontakion presents challenges for wide-spread scholarly conception of the kontakion as a genre, since it is not in the same poetic form as most of the hymns of Romanos. The initial capitals on the first folio of the *Akathistos* receive non-figural illumination in red and blue, with yellow wash (P f. 209r). It is quite clear from the manuscript folia that the *Akathistos* has been used more than Romanos's Annunciation hymn (P f. 212r-214v). It is darkened and has several stains and marks, while the margins of the hymn by Romanos are blank and clean. So while the manuscripts P and Q do not show evidence of heavy use, this is one obvious exception. The increased wear may reflect liturgical practices according to the later Byzantine rite, where this is the only kontakion read in its entirety during the normal liturgical year. Was this practice already emerging in the years after the manuscript was copied? It is possible that P and Q sat in Patmos's library largely unused?

Between Monastery and the Sung Office: Romanos and the Liturgy of the Kontakarion

It is clear, however, that the kontakarion was compiled in order to be used. Rubrics indicate that the kontakia should be sung. Many include the words ἀδόμενον or ψαλλόμενον (e.g. Q ff. 15r, 26r, 68v, 80r, 98r). The kontakia are organized according to the liturgical calendar, with the feast or date indicated on the top of the page. The kontakia were collected and presented for liturgical performance. Some communities in the tenth century must have needed a complete cycle of kontakia for their services. It remains unclear, however, what kind of service the Kontakarion's scribes (in its various manuscript witnesses) intended it for.

Lingas (1995) has demonstrated that the kontakion continued to be an integral part of the *asmatike akolouthia*, the “sung office,” of the urban cathedral rite in Constantinople through the twelfth century. Constantinople seems to have been bi-ritual in centuries before the twelfth century. The *hagiopolitis* rite, with its roots in Jerusalem, may have entered the churches of the capital as early as the sixth century. For years the two rites existed side by side until the synthesis known as the Byzantine rite gradually emerged. While the kontakion was written for the Constantinopolitan rite, the kanon hymn has traditionally been thought to belong to the *hagiopolitis* rite (Frøyshov 2013). Earlier scholarship has connected the *hagiopolitis* rite to monasteries and the efforts by the Stoudios Monastery to create more comprehensive hymn collections in the ninth century. The strict dichotomy, however, between a monastic rite with kanon hymns on one hand and a popular cathedral rite with kontakia on the other is

increasingly being questioned by scholars. Were these two rites really kept as separate as we have been used to thinking? In other words, were the kontakaria written down for use in the cathedral rite alone, or may they also have been used in the hagiopolitis rite at this time? How else could truncated kontakia have ended up, eventually, as a part of Orthros, or Morning Prayer, in the middle of the kanon?

The Kontakarion as a service book is an anthology of hymns by a great many authors. What struck us about the Patmos kontakarion was the vastness of the genre. Only about 20% of the compositions are attributed to Romanos, the majority of these in Q, dedicated to the moveable cycle. Scholars have generally assumed that the hymns on various saints reflect later efforts to fill out the liturgical calendar, including the so-called *dubia* of Romanos, which Maas and Trypanis (1970: 186ff) determined lacked poetic quality. In any event, many of the kontakia are most certainly later works. Kontakion composition continued at least into the ninth century, and the Patmos manuscripts attest to the thriving vivacity of the genre.

The later kontakia, largely dedicated to feasts of saints, are characterized by the use of acclamation rather than the dialogues most frequent in Romanos, suggesting a development of the genre as liturgical tastes changed (Grosdidier de Matons 1980: 263). To some extent this stylistic choice assimilates the direct address to the saint in a kontakion to similar trends in the development of the kanon hymn. An important aspect of kontakion composition in this period is that more authors have a monastic background, and we know that some of them were also composing kanons. It is puzzling that a full collection of kontakia, such as the Patmos kontakarion, seems to have been penned in one monastery and apparently used and kept in another. While the Stoudite reform—if such a thing ever existed—did not necessarily monastisize the Kontakarion's rite itself, monks were increasingly involved in the process of editing and composing hymnography. The presence of kontakia by the great monastic leader Theodore the Stoudite in the corpus of hymns in the Patmos (and other) manuscripts suggests that the formation of the kontakarion as a service book containing a complete liturgical sequence of hymns for the entire year may have taken place in Constantinople, under the supervision of the Stoudites (cf. Lingas 1995: 53). This was also, of course, the century when the monks of Stoudios were compiling the Triodion, with kanons and stichera for the period of Lent, and Joseph the Hymnographer, who also had a monastic background, was composing enormous numbers of kanon hymns to fill out the Menaia. The Patmos kontakarion seems to have been executed around the same time as Symeon Metaphrastes was generating his Menologion (Ševčenko 1998). The creation of the Kontakarion as a type of service book thus coordinates with other efforts to canonize a liturgical cycle of hymns and readings for the calendar of saints.

The kontakarion's ordering of Romanos's hymns on biblical themes reflects the placement of the relevant pericopes in the emerging middle Byzantine lectionary cycle in Constantinople, as reflected in the ninth-tenth century Typikon of the Great Church. We do not have firm evidence for lectionary assignments in Romanos's own era, thus while some of the hymns, especially those for major Christological and Marian feasts, are almost certainly assigned to the same days that Romanos intended, others may have been moved to accommodate the structure of the later lectionary. Some assignments seem odd, so that a hymn whose original liturgical occasion—if any—is unclear has been assigned somewhat arbitrarily. A case in point would be *On Earthquakes and Fires* (54), which appears in its entirety only in the Patmos kontakarion and is assigned to Wednesday of the third week of Lent. (Another manuscript, Sinai gr. 927, copied at Sinai in 1285, is peculiarly arranged and contains only one stanza of the hymn without assignment [Grosdidier de Matons 1977: 72]).

When we compare the Patmos tomes with other extant kontakaria (Grosdidier de Matons 1977: 74-93), we note that some of Romanos's hymns are assigned uniformly in a number of witnesses, especially for the major feasts of Christ and Mary. But the kontakarion tradition as a whole includes a great deal of variation, particularly for minor, and in some cases more recent feasts, and for saints' days (Grosdidier de Matons 1977: 93-4). In fact, the variety of hymns assigned is comparable to the variation among extant Middle Byzantine Triodion manuscripts, suggesting that while there were some efforts at standardization, Middle Byzantine hymnals in general, including the Kontakarion, were essentially open traditions, receptive to local variation, and occasionally providing multiple options for any given observance. For example, Q provides three possibilities for the lection of the Sinful Woman on Holy Wednesday, suggesting that those using the manuscript were invited to choose. In very rare cases in the Patmos volumes, a kontakion is given with two preludes. For Romanos's *On Peter's Denial* (18; Q f. 84v) and *On the Passion* (20; Q f. 93r) a second prelude is presented as an alternative with the words ἄλλο κουκούλιον, "another prelude," again suggesting some discretion on the part of a performer.

If we see the Kontakarion as part of a ninth- and tenth-century drive to organize and systematize liturgical time, then these service books played an important part in liturgical life. The continued composition of kontakia and the performer's freedom to choose between different texts for the same liturgical event point in the direction of a vital liturgical genre. It remains an open question, however, what liturgical context the kontakia were performed in during the tenth century and later. A few of the kontakia in the Patmos manuscript are truncated—and we know that they are not just short, because in some cases the scribe gives the whole of the original acrostic in the title, even though a number of stanzas are lacking (see e.g. *On St. Basil*, P f. 208r)—but most are not. The majority of the hymns are given in their full length.

Even if the hymns of Romanos first served for the urban lay night vigil (Lingas 1995; Grosdidier 1973:255; Koder 1997-99; Koder 2003), as has been now generally accepted, the Kontakarion itself does not appear to have been designed for this service alone—the Typikon of the Great Church shows no trace of such a developed use of the kontakion (see, however, Mateos 1963: 301). The service book governing the office had come under monastic editorial control. Thus the nature of the service at which a Kontakarion would function still remains unclear, but may have been common to lay and monastic congregations alike. Why did the monastic compilers, perhaps at the Stoudios Monastery, create the archetype? It was not integrated with other service books (such as a Triodion or Pentekostarion), used largely at Morning Prayer. Thus it appears that this collection was intended for a distinct office, most likely a vigil, now greatly expanded in use from Romanos's original festal cycle. Despite Lingas's work, the Patmos manuscript itself is not direct evidence for the Middle Byzantine lay cathedral vigil.

Moreover, it remains unclear how and when kontakia as a genre made their transition from being part of a lay Night Vigil, as attested in the sixth and seventh centuries, into a service book reflecting concerns about semi-daily celebrations by the end of the ninth century. Did this happen simultaneously with the truncation of the kontakion to a prelude and (usually) a single stanza to be intercalated in the midst of the kanon hymn at Orthros? Or were these developments independent of each other, as monastic communities assimilated—or participated in—the singing of a kontakion in its entirety during a vigil service? Did the merging into the Byzantine rite synthesis involve assimilating important materials in their entirety from the cathedral office into a hagiopolitis

service? This revisiting of the tenth-century kontakarion does suggest that the relation between the two rites in Constantinople were more flexible and open in this period. The production of a Kontakarion manuscript in one Middle Byzantine monastic library, probably Mt. Latros, and its preservation in another, namely Patmos, suggests that a service book containing a complete cycle of kontakia was deemed necessary for the liturgical functioning of a monastic community—at least one founded from Constantinople with imperial patronage.

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