

UNIVERSITY „*LUCIAN BLAGA*” - SIBIU
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***THE BLESSINGS OF THE DEAD IN THE
CHURCH SINGING OF THE
ARCHDIOCESE OF SIBIU. ORALITY
ASPECTS***

DOCTORAL THESIS

-Summary-

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When I announced my intention to start the doctoral studies at the Faculty of Theology „Andrei Șaguna" from Sibiu, Pr. Prof. Dr. Vasile Grăjdian, the scientific coordinator of this paper, proposed to approach a research topic that concern **issues of orality of the church singing in the churches of Archdiocese of Sibiu.**

We must point out that between 2002-2004 a research group from the Faculty of Theology „Andrei Șaguna", University "Lucian Blaga" from Sibiu - consisting of Pr. Prof. Univ.dr.Vasile Grăjdian (project director), Lecturer Univ.drd. Sorin Dobre, Prep.Ing.Corina Grecu, Librarian-Archivist Ing.Iuliana Streza - obtained a series of grants of the Ministry of Education and Research - National Research Council of Higher Education (MEC-CNCSIS 290/ 2002 No.3, 368/2003, 368/2004) to finance the project "**Research and systematic exploitation of orality hoard of church singing in churches of Archdiocese of Sibiu**".

Besides the overall objective of the project (systematic research and **capitalization of the variants (!)** of the church singing in the Archdiocese of Sibiu) have been established and some specific objectives:

- *Identifying and cataloging* of the church singers- informers from the Archdiocese of Sibiu by the criteria of the age, training, rural or urban area of origin etc.

- *The collection of a large amount of variants* of the ecclesiastical traditional singing from the Archdiocese of Sibiu

- *Selecting and ordering* variants collected and the achievement of a Sound Archive and a multimedia Archive (CD and DVD), comprising songs collected, videos, digital photographs

- *Transcription and systematic musicological analysis* of some of collected variants

- **The creation of some presentation materials containing the research results: studies**, scientific monographs, catalogs etc.

If the first three specific objectives as listed above were realised by the members of the research group in the first (in terms of time) phases of the project, the final two specific objectives were designed to be performed in the last phase of the project, when audio, multimedia and information archive already existed and could be processed. It was also

envisaged to attract and others interested in engaging in this phase of systematic analytical processing of sound material preserved.

This study is part approach to the direction of the last two mentioned specific objectives of the research project which I referred, as an *attempt of musicological and ethnological analysis, having in attention the musical structures (melodic formulas, cadences, etc.), items of agogic, rhythmic, style of interpretation, vocal technique and sociological aspects encountered in singers analyzed.*

Given the considerable amount of the entire sound material collected in the above-mentioned project (approximately 3500 minutes of recording) and its diversity (over 3000 distinct melodic examples) **I found myself forced to choose a sample of songs suitable for study, thus opting for the song of *The Blessings of the dead.***

In this choice we took into account a factually aspect, that **this song was not denoted by Dimitrie Cunțanu in the Collection of funeral chants edited by him in 1903.**

I turned my attention toward the song of *The Blessings of the dead* with a **desire to clarify the condition of this song as sung it in various parishes in the Archdiocese of Sibiu and identification of a melodic matrix common to all singers** (on the assumption that it should be).

To this main objective of research I attached an aesthetic-musical other, watching various aspects of the melodic structure.

To achieve these objectives and winning a greater degree of relevance of the study **we considered useful to refer to all versions of the song of *The Blessings of the dead* gathered from the singers of the Archive that i referred above.** Without claiming to exhaustive treatment of this song (which would have been impossible in a work of this kind and of this size) **I wished nevertheless to have a comprehensive approach at least in terms of the *group of informants (rapporteurs)* of this song.** So we came to refer to **all 77 church singers of the Archdiocese of Sibiu who provided various versions of the song of The Blessings of the dead.**

Because I realized that it is impossible to analyze completely, in parallel, the 77 songs, **we used the method of comparative analysis of two witness-passages of the song,** both with introductory role.

The first is the **start fragment of verse „*My soul shall live ...*”** and represents the contents of the first chapter (II.1) of the special part of the work.

The second is **the introductory passage (including the first melodic formula)** of verse sung before each stichera of *The blessings of the dead*: „*Blessed are you, Lord ...*” presented during the second chapter of the same special part (II.2).

The witness- passages we studied primarily in terms of *melodic structure*. Basically we presented variants *from the simple to the complex*.

Variants of two introductory passages I usually classified according to certain *structural-melodic criteria*, represented by certain *musical notes, musical intervals, melodic formulas, musical scales or songs*.

For the verse „*My soul shall live ...*” (II.1) I used most often as a **criterion** for differentiating the variants **the third small downward** musical interval between *si bemol-la*, and other musical intervals. Regarding these musical intervals I have stated their *position* within the musical phrase and the *frequency* with which they occur. I also referred to the *exceptional musical scales* (tetrachordal and pentachordal respectively) which are built two variants, because at the end of the chapter to present *exceptional variants in terms of the quantity of musical notes (eighths)* that it contains the introductory formula.

For the second witness- passage analyzed- verse „*Blessed are you, Lord ...*” (II.2), in addition to purely musical criteria *we used in some situations the criterion of distribution the text above de song*, namely singing certain syllables on two musical notes. Also, in addition to the criteria used in compiling of Chapter II.1, **I have sometimes referred to the structure unchanged and sometimes modified-** augmented or reduced- **of the first melodic formula**. One obvious variants (presented and this time towards the end of classification) I named referring to the song of *The Blessings of the dead* denoted by Rev. Prof. Ioan Brie. In this chapter we presented two versions exceptional both as the place of origin (Braşov County) especially as melody.

To the different variants and sub-variants of the two witness- passages **I have assigned microregional identity**, when all or the vast majority of the singers were from the same geographical micro-region.

Sometimes I extract **different logical and/ or mathematical meanings** of the melodic structures that we have approached from a dual perspective, both horizontal and vertical, and I analyzed **the balance of these structures**. I brought **textual considerations**, when was imposed.

We often operated with the **groups of the representatives- singers** of various variants. We noticed the **uniqueness of certain structural elements** and also the **exceptional character** of others when they were found.

I called often to **biographical information** that we hold about singers analyzed to clarify certain musical aspects. Sometimes we associate different variants of melodic formulas with aspects of **domiciliary or educational** nature of singers analyzed. Sometimes I made reference to **skills and musical knowledge** (hearing and musical memory, creativity), but also some **disturbing elements**, such as difficulty hearing, speech or memory.

Beyond the **obvious and undeniable *uniformity*** of the song analyzed in terms of multilateral, **transpires impressive *diversity of modes of singing this song***, played in the multitude of variants of the two witness- passages.

The first witness- passage consisting of only 6 musical notes (introductory fragment of verse „*My soul shall live ...*“) is the **richest in terms of variants- 22**. It is a testimony to the fact that a melodic passage with a physiognomy mainly linear can be expressed by the 75 singers analyzed in 22 different ways. The large number of variants is explained by the fact that this introductory fragment consists of six „free scores" (which are not part of any of the melodic formulas specific song) which allows for a wide range of possibilities of musical expression. The passage is only a preparation for the first melodic formula, preparation that is not subject to strict rules of composition.

The second witness- passage (introductory fragment of verse „*Blessed are you, Lord*“) presents a number slightly lower of variants-17, probably as a consequence of the fact that it contains a part of first melodic formula, which formula, as well as all other formulas in structure, is more stable .

In the last chapter of the Special Part- II.3 - I have developed some **orality issues** that we considered most significant: **special musical phrase endings** (II.3.1) usually performed by **exceptional cadences** or **situations of overcome specific song pentatonic scale** (III.3.2).

A separate chapter I dedicated to the **particular case of the family of singers Luca** originating in Ocna- Sibiului (II.3.3). Thanks to a considerable quantity of aesthetic elements that are found in variants provided by the two singer- brothers, Dumitru and Simion, we considered useful the full and thorough analysis of these two songs, over approximately 35 pages.

For that **the great diversity of variants of the two witness-passages it is possible because of orality characterizing church music from Transylvania, I dedicated the first part (I) of this work for the *historical, theological, and practical substantiating of the orality church music.***

I first defined the **concept of orality**, after which we analyzed in the first chapter the orality of the church music from Transylvania in the XIX- XX centuries (I.1.1) and placed it

in the context of Byzantine orality, clarifying also the relation between orality and musical notation (I.1.2). Next I presented the bivalent character of orality -amplification and simplification of the melodic line (I.1.3)- and the cultural reason for studying the orality of the church music from Transylvania (I.1.4).

In the second chapter of the first part (I.2) we analyzed the relation between Eastern church music and secular music, watching various degrees of particularity of this issue, starting with the reporting to the western secular music (I.2.1), continuing with the reporting to the Eastern secular music (I.2.2), to reach to the more special and direct interest report of the Transylvanian church music with profane music (I.2.3).

We felt that the latter chapter requires some nuances, which is why we subdivided it referring to several issues:

- Mostly rural musical culture of the church singers from Transylvania (I.2.3.1) that influenced the Research method of the church music (I.2.3.1.1)

- Oikonomic musical attitudes in Orthodox Church in Transylvania (I.2.3.2)

The last chapter of the first part (I.3) - treats the **textual nature of the orthodox church music** and the role of the word in Byzantine hymnography (I.3.1), continuing with the liturgical substantiating of orality (I.3.2), as well as the ontological and theological substantiating (I.3.3).

Theoretical and practical approach to song of *The Blessings of the dead*, as playing it by singers analyzed from the Archdiocese of Sibiu, led us toward the conclusion that it **is an example of regionally musical uniformity**, which exists not as a consequence of centralized steps to liturgical uniformity, but **following a common musical- religious identity** that lasts for centuries.

Uniformity is that **all the singers from Sibiu county registered use the song specific for *The Blessings of the dead*, not the applied melody of Troparion voice V**, as would be expected as shown in Euchologion (as happens for example with Blessings of the Resurrection at Matins) and as practiced in the whole space of influence psaltic music. Only two singers registered in Braşov County (treated separately in the last part of the chapter dedicated to the verse „*Blessed are You Lord ...*”) are discordant note against the body of singers from Sibiu County, using the applied melody of Troparion voice V.

What is especially appreciative of this song is that **it circulated and preserved to this day in one form exclusively oral and there is no reference (or alternative) variants in any of the printed collections of church hymns in Transylvania**. The fact that the song was not denoted in writing and perpetuated exclusively orally proves that **there was no need for this**

kind of writing for it to keep and prove once again the *strength of orality phenomenon* that is *alive* and *dynamic*.

Studying the orality of Orthodox church music in Transylvania is the only way to do justice to this music, for long regarded as a *simple* and *simplistic*. Examples analyzed contradict that finding and reveals just the opposite, talking about a **wide variety and complexity**.