

AGNIESZKA HESZEN  
(JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY)

**METHODIUS OF OLYMPUS – ONE OF THE  
GREEK SOURCES OF *KONTAKIA* BY ROMANOS  
THE MELODIST**

KEYWORDS: Methodius of Olympus, Romanos the Melodist, *Thecla's Hymn*, kontakion, refrain

SUMMARY: In this article the author compares *Thecla's Hymn* from Methodius of Olympus's *Symposium* with some kontakia by Romanos the Melodist. The analysis of a few stanzas of *Thecla's Hymn* shows that this work can be a model for the kontakia. Methodius in his song gives examples of heroes of the Old and New Testament that sing a refrain. Romanos in their kontakia made a similar structure, the refrain is variously linked to stanzas and often spoken by different characters.

In many previous research works about Romanos the Melodist the connections of his kontakia with Syriac poetry has been underlined.<sup>1</sup> The genre *kontakion* is a poetic sermon with liturgical purpose, composed on the occasion of any holiday and probably given after the reading of the Gospel. The first stanzas (*oikoi*) of kontakia derive from an earlier hymnic genre – *troparion* or work which was sung as an acclamation

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Wellesz, 1949; Maas, 1963, pp. xv-vxi; Schork, 1966, p. 274; Grosdidier, 1977, p. 16f. That view is also seen in more recent scholars: Koder, 2001, p. 115; Argárate, 2007, abstracts [on-line:] <http://www.bsana.net/conference/archives/2007/BSCAbstracts2007.pdf> (accessed Feb., 17 2014).

between verses of Psalms,<sup>2</sup> while the next ones develop a biblical story or memory of saints and martyrs. Sources of this kind of works were recognized as originating from Syriac genres, as *memra*, *sogita*, *madra-sha*. These hypotheses have been confirmed by the origin of Romanos, because it is obvious that he was born in Berytos (Beirut) and from these time the Syriac roots of his poetry could be taken; but there is a supposition too, that Romanos the Melodist was educated in Greek culture and read the songs of his great predecessor, St. Ephrem the Syrian, in Greek translations. It was not until the discovery of the homily *Peri Pascha* of Melito that it was proved that the source of a poetic sermon in Greek literature is exactly this very work. The description of a specific holiday and its interpretation by form of multiple antitheses, anaphors is very similar in both poets.

In my article I would like to point out one more Greek source of Romanos the Melodist's *kontakia*, namely the hymn on Jesus from Methodius of Olympos' *Symposium, or on Virginity (Symposion e peri hagneias)*. The hymn is ending the dialogue about chastity modelled on literary and philosophical aspects of Plato's *Symposium* (the hymn is styled after this model), and its starting point is the parable about ten virgins from Mt 25, 1-13. In the Methodius' *Symposium* ten virgins give a laudatory speech of chastity – their speeches have features of *agon* (like praises of Eros in Plato's work)<sup>3</sup> and next Arete, the housekeeper and the initiator of the meeting, decorates Thecla<sup>4</sup> with a wreath of victory. Thecla is not a random idea of Methodius. Her name refers to Saint Thecla, the heroine of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, who was a disciple of Paul the Apostle. Perhaps one of the participants of *Symposium* is the same Thecla, as her companions define her precisely as "disciple of St. Paul".<sup>5</sup> The appointment time is unspecified, the place is symbolic (a garden of virtue), contrary to what happens in the Platonic dialogue.<sup>6</sup> The crowned

<sup>2</sup> About the origins of *kontakia*, see: Wellesz, 1949, p. 201f.; Grosdidier, 1977, chap. 1; 1973, pp. 364-365.

<sup>3</sup> B. Zorzi notes that in Methodius' dialogue the conception of Eros was transformed into the conception of chastity: Eros – agneia (Zorzi, 2003, pp. 102-127).

<sup>4</sup> Regarding Thecla's speech and its ecclesiological sense, see: Montserrat-Torrents, 1986, pp. 89-101.

<sup>5</sup> *Symp.* 170 (Musurillo, Debidour (eds.), 1963).

<sup>6</sup> See: Bril, 2005, pp. 279-302.

Thecla is invited by Arete to sing a song in honour of Christ the Bridegroom. Thecla begins the anthem by a refrain, followed by the twenty four stanzas, arranged in an alphabetical acrostic, interspersed with the refrain. The hymn is an expression of deep love for the Divine Bridegroom. That is also the Bride of Christ – Ecclesia – mentioned; and in several stanzas the hymn is addressed to her (the 7<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>). Especially one piece of *Thecla's Hymn* is important as a comparison to kontakia by Romanos the Melodist, namely stanzas 11-18, which are called *pars media*.<sup>7</sup> The analysis will be given below.

Connections of Romanos with ancient Greek writers have been repeatedly examined – F. Conca and G. Swart point in their work to some issues related to the influence of Euripides on kontakia, exploring the questions of language, metaphors and the similarity of themes and images.<sup>8</sup> Swart makes a comparative analysis of a fragment of kontakion *Mary under the Cross*<sup>9</sup> with a similar piece of drama *Christus patiens* and as *tertium comparationis* for both the authors the impact of dramas of Euripides is considered. Another Greek author, already of the later period, who repeatedly appears in comparative studies of Byzantium and antiquity is Gregory of Nazianzus; one should mention here Karavites' work on the influences of the Theologian on Bizantine poetry.<sup>10</sup>

Among the scholars only J. Koder and J. Grosdidier de Matons noted the possibility of associating Romanos the Melodist with the work of the Methodius of Olympus, although Koder believes too that Romanos the Melodist in some respects based the structure of kontakion on St Ephrem.<sup>11</sup> He pointed out the passage preceding *Thecla's Song*, namely the announcement of performance of the anthem, which is a kind of a *didaskalium*<sup>12</sup> – there we are similar preview in kontakion *About the Prodigal Son*, where we are told about intoning songs during

<sup>7</sup> Commentary to the *Hymn*, see: Pellegrino, 1958. The designation of stanzas 11-18 as *pars media* is my idea, I use this term *per analogiam* to *Homeric Hymns*, in which this structure has been distinguished (see: Danielewicz, 1976, pp. 24-32).

<sup>8</sup> Conca, 2001, pp. 235-246; Swart, 1990, pp. 53-64.

<sup>9</sup> SCh 128, 35. Numeration of kontakia and quotations according to edition: Romanos le Mélode, *Hymnes*, t. 1-5, ed. Grosdidier de Matons, 1964-1981.

<sup>10</sup> Karavites, 1993, pp. 81-98.

<sup>11</sup> See note 1.

<sup>12</sup> The proposition of the use of this term here is my own.

the feast. J. Koder sees parallels between the structure of *Thecla's Hymn* – prologue, strophes, refrain – and the structure of the kontakia, except that that applies rather to the *Akathistos*.<sup>13</sup>

Grosdidier de Matons, on the other hand, calls *Thecla's Hymn* „un kontakion primitif”. His thesis regarding the refrain is very interesting, because he believes that the refrain, which lies before the first stanza, is a form of *prooimion*.<sup>14</sup>

The purpose of my article is a comparative analysis of a fragment of *Thecla's Hymn* with several kontakia of Romanos. I would like to emphasize the importance of a dramatic structure with the function of the refrain in the *opus* of Methodius and Romanos, and draw the attention to the resemblance not so much in the sphere of language, imagery or metaphor (*i.e.* in terms of poetry) as in the structural one, which is associated with a dramatic structure of kontakion, with its *pars epica* and the refrain, because all of these elements are also found in *Thecla's Hymn*.

The majority of kontakia by Romanos have a clear, symmetrical structure: a prooimion that includes the *argumentum* of the whole song and often a biblical quote, and next the refrain and stanzas (*oikoi*), arranged by acrostic<sup>15</sup> and each of them finished by a refrain. The symmetry lies in the fact that one or two of the first stanzas are the author's commentary, just the last few ones and the final verses consist of a prayer and a salutation of God. However, the most extensive part of the narrative is the form of a dialogue (there are also *soliloquia*)<sup>16</sup>, in which different characters of the story appear as though they were on the scene. The researchers pay attention to the theatrical or rather

<sup>13</sup> “Aufgrund seiner formalen Parallelen – Strophengliederung, Akrostichis, Refrain – könnte das Parthenion sich als Brücke zum Kontakion erweisen, besonders wenn man den geringen zeitlichen Abstand zu dem nunmehr früh datierten Akathistos bedenkt” (*op. cit.*, p. 118).

<sup>14</sup> “Le refrain est repris au début de la première strophe, disposition qui fait songer au prooimion des kontakia, lequel vient probablement du développement du refrain” (Grosdidier de Matons, 1964-1981, p. 4).

<sup>15</sup> As J. Grosdidier de Matons writes, acrostic has Semitic roots (*ibidem*, p. 5).

<sup>16</sup> See: “Byzantine homilists did not employ only dramatic dialogues, i. e. real or invented conversations between the protagonists, but also monologues, the characters' internal soliloquies” (Simić, 2011, pp. 7-37).

dramatic features of *kontakia* by Romanos. It is important to distinguish, as R. J. Schork writes, so it can not be spoken here of theatricality or theatricalisation of the liturgy, but only of „the dramatic dimension in the hymns of Romanos”.<sup>17</sup>

In my opinion, the literary model can be taken here from *Thecla's Hymn* of Methodius, in which in the extended part of the narrative, presenting *exempla* of chastity (heroes of the Old and New Testament, who retain purity in the face of various adversities), these characters pronounce the words of a refrain:

Ἄγνεύω σοι καὶ λαμπάδας φασφόρους  
κρατοῦσα, νυμφίε, ὑπαντάνω σοι.<sup>18</sup>

In Methodius' work all these heroes are positive examples, while in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> stanzas, when he is talking about the virgins who have forgotten the oil and had not managed to meet the Bridegroom, Thecla repeats the refrain as the initiator of the anthem and its coryphaeus. Romanos the Melodist went even further in this concept and diversified a form of an expression of the refrain by negative characters too, as we shall see below. Methodius could be an inspiration for this structure of speech, such as Melito of Sardis for the poetic homily at all.

The presented characters are examples of chastity of the Old and New Testament: Abel, Joseph, Jephthah's daughter, Judith, Susanna,<sup>19</sup> John the Baptist and Our Lady. These stanzas (11<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>) are centrally located in the *Hymn* and are the *pars epica* – a constitutive element of the *Homeric Hymns* and other pagan hymns. Each of these stanzas of *Thecla's Hymn* are the evocation of biblical stories in which the motif of maintaining chastity by the hero is repeated, which is an *exemplum* illustrating the thesis of the entire work, which the anthem is woven into.

<sup>17</sup> Schork, 1966, p. 279. Cf. too: “He [Romanos] was operating in a tradition that was only analogously dramatic – and certainly not theatrical. This internal evidence [...] indicates that the *kontakia* were never intended to be staged” (*ibidem*, p. 278).

<sup>18</sup> *Symp.* 284-292.

<sup>19</sup> Susanna is often compared with Joseph in early Christian literature, see: Praet, 2010, p. 556-580.

The 11<sup>th</sup> strophe illustrates Abel who is presented here as the prototype of the death of Christ.<sup>20</sup> Clearly the way of the narrative is changing in relation to the previous stanzas – that Abel himself complains of his brother and immediately turns to God saying:

Ἄνηλεῶς με συγγόνου τετρωμένον χειρι  
δέξαι, λιτάζομαι, λόγε

followed by a refrain. Abel's statement is preceded by a pointer – like theatrical stage directions: ἔλεξεν... βλέπων εἰς οὐρανόν.

The 12<sup>th</sup> strophe presents the character of Joseph. There is a mention of the attempt to seduce him by the wife of Potiphar (γυνή φλογωμένη πόθοις). To resist her he “escapes calling”: ἔφυγε... ἐκβοῶν ἀγνεύω σοι... The structure is similar to that in the previous stanza – the information about who sings the words of the refrain and then the refrain.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> strophe the daughter of Jephthah who was sacrificed to God “as an innocent lamb” is referred to (νεοσφαγῆ κόρην ἀνήγε θυσίαν θεῷ... ἀμνάδος δίκην).<sup>21</sup> This is again a prefiguration of Christ, her words are preceded by the tip-*didaskalium*: ἡ δ' ἔκραζε καρτερῶς ἀγνεύω σοι...

The 14<sup>th</sup> strophe refers to the *exemplum* of Judith who killed the enemy, deluding him first with her beauty (κάλλεος τύποις θέλξασα τοῦτον). However, she managed to keep her chastity, so she can say the words of the refrain in triumph: νικαφόροις δ' ἔφη βοαίς ἀγνεύω σοι...

The 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> strophes tell about Susannah and lecherous old men. There is the increasingly complex narrative or scene, because old people can express their point in direct speech (*oratio recta*):

ὦ γυναῖ,  
κρυπτῶν σου γάμων λέχη ποθοῦντες ἦκομεν, φίλα.

The dialogue ensues between them, the sayings of Susannah preceded by the ones similar to the previous indication: ἡ δ' ἐντρόμοις ἔφη βοαίς; it begins with a refrain of the 15<sup>th</sup> stanza and the whole 16<sup>th</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Cf.: “Nell’omelia sulla Passione di Melitone di Sardi Abele, Isaco, Giacobbe, Giuseppe, i profeti, Davide, sono indicati quali «tipi» di Cristo sofferente” (Pellegrino, 1958, p. 95).

<sup>21</sup> Cf.: “è detta Maria, in relazione con Cristo «agnello», da Romano il Melode, nell’*inno* 21, v. 7” (*ibidem*, p. 98. Pellegrino quotes Romanos according to edition by N. B. Tomadakis).

stanza is full of indignant response to the proposal of the elders. This is followed by a brief prayer to the Lord for deliverance from the voluptuaries: *σῶσόν με, Χριστέ, τῶνδε...* and again the refrain.

Strophe 17 introduces us to the area of the New Testament: it talks about John the Baptist and his death at the hands of the “evil man” who punished him for “a virtue”:

ὁ σὸς  
 πρόδρομος ἀνόμος κακοῦ πρὸς ἀνδρὸς εἷς σφαγὴν  
 ἤχθη δι’ ἀγνεῖαν...

John, as mentioned (“occurring”) earlier figures, returns in the refrain to God’s. His call precedes the verb *ἔκραζε*.

And finally, the 18<sup>th</sup> strophe, as if to crown the previous examples, describes the Mother of God. According to the convention before the Council of Nicea, she is called *Ζωητόκος*,<sup>22</sup> *ανδ τηε ναμε ισ φολλοωεδ βθ σεξεραλ επιτηετσ, ωηιχη ηαζε φεατυρεσ οφ laudati* ὁ χάρις ἀθικτος, ἄτεγκτος. An episode from the life of the Virgin referenced here is her defense against allegations of “tainted bed” (*μομφὴν ὑπέσχεεν ὡς προδοῦσα λέκτρα παρθένος*), and the words of the defense are the word of the refrain (*ἀγνεύω σοι...*), preceded by a verb *ἔλεξε*.

The 19<sup>th</sup> strophe, belonging to the author, summarizes these characters – these are saints who came to the heavenly wedding:

Τὴν σὴν, μάκαρ, γαμήλιον ποθοῦντες ἀμέραν  
 ἰδεῖν, ὅσους ἀνωθεν αὐτὸς ἀγγέλων ἀναξ  
 κέκληκας, ἤκασιν μέγιστα δῶρά σοι, λόγε,  
 φέροντες ἀσπίλοις στολαῖς  
 Ἄγνεύω σοι...

These previews: crying, he said, cried, etc., that occur in each of these stanzas, are like theatrical stage directions, suggesting that these are precisely these characters who speak their dialogue (e.g. requests for rescue) and sing the chorus. It is worth noting that the immediacy of expression of these heroes, that they are as if placed on the “stage” is reinforced several times by apostrophe: Abel and Susan call on directly

<sup>22</sup> Not *θεοτόκος*, as it was established as dogma in 431. Before the Council in Ephesus destinations of Mother of God were quite free, what provoked religious controversies.

to God by his name<sup>23</sup> with an imperative. I cannot agree with the J. Koder who says that the refrain is sung by the chorus of girls – in the intertextual reality, in the “microcosm of the stage” these words are expressed by heroes-*exempla*, it is their declaration of commitment to Christ. I would add that Abel and Susan speak of even the broader issues than the only refrain.

I will look now at some selected kontakia of Romanos the Melodist with regard to the presence of the characters in the poem and the way they express themselves. I would like to draw attention to a few works, where the use of the refrain or the form of the dialogue seems to be very interesting. In the kontakion *For Christmas*<sup>24</sup> after the prooimion and the first stanza, in which there is the author’s “we” used as a speaker, the song begins with the statement of Mary in a dialogue with other characters: the Son and the Magi. Mary bends over her Infant-King-Maker and addresses him in beautiful apostrophes, with which God is usually praised:

Ἵψηλὲ βασιλεῦ...

Ποιητὰ οὐρανοῦ... (3)

Μεγάλα μοι, τέκνον,

Μεγάλα πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησας μετὰ τῆς πτωχείας μου... (6)

Αὐτόν σε δόξαν ἔχω καὶ καύχημα· διὸ οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι·

αὐτὸς εἶ χάρις καὶ ἡ εὐπρέπεια τῆς σκηπῆς κάμου... (7)<sup>25</sup>

What is very interesting, the very young child also speaks in the work: the author without giving up the realism – after all, this is a baby – used a dose of fantasy, which here can be explained by the nature of this divine Child and something that a human being would call “a mother’s intuition”. However, in the stage directions the introductory statement of the baby Jesus, the author-narrator says that Jesus Christ “touched his mother’s mind”:

Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστὸς ὄντως τε καὶ Θεὸς ἡμῶν

τῶν φρενῶν ἀφανῶς ἦψατο μητρὸς αὐτοῦ. (8)

<sup>23</sup> The proper name or theological term: Χριστὲ and Λόγε.

<sup>24</sup> SCh 110, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Let us notice to the similarity of these words to the anthem Μεγαλύνει... (Lk 1, 46-55).

Then follows a statement as if Jesus', cited in *oratio recta*, as indicated by the form of imperatives and phrases addressed to Mary:

Εισάγαγε (...) οὐδ' ἤγαγον λόγῳ...

Νῦν οὖν δέξαι, σεμνή, δέξαι τοὺς δεξαμένους με·

ἐν αὐτοῖς γὰρ εἰμι ὥσπερ ἐν ταῖς ἀγκάλαις σου. (8-9)

This creates a virtual dialogue between the mother and her tiny son.

The character, whose words Mary does not cite directly, is Joseph – the author adheres here to the Gospel tradition, according to which Joseph is a silent character, not uttering a single word, but obediently accepting the will of God. In the 11<sup>th</sup> strophe Mary says to the Magi of Joseph; she utters the words that might indicate his statement: αὐτὸς γὰρ λέξει ἅπερ ἀκήκοε περὶ τοῦ παιδίου μου (“he will tell you...”), but eventually Joseph does not say anything – it is Mary who recounts his story, which is showed unquestionably by the grammatical forms of the third person:

Ῥητορεύει σαφῶς ἅπαντα ἅπερ ἤκουσεν·

ἀπαγγέλλει τρανῶς ὅσα αὐτὸς ἐώρακεν. (12)

This is a very interesting experiment, given that Romanos liked to introduce a lot of characters talking in the poem and actually someone's statement was quoted in *oratio indirecta* very rarely. However, faithfulness to the tradition, proved to be stronger than the desire to diversify the composition of the work.

The central part of the drama is the conversation between Our Lady and the Magi, in turn, quoted here are the Herod's questions – as the relation of newcomers from the East. But the Pharisees' questions, “the first of people” (οἱ πρῶτοι τοῦ ἔθνους σου, 17), are quoted as if they said, i.e. in a form of the second person, addressed to the Magi:

Πόθεν καὶ πότε ἤκατε;

πῶς μὴ φαινομένας ὠδεύσατε τρίβους;

The magi answer them, so the dialogue is formed once again. Of course, this form of narration is there and we cannot assume from the outset that these are the characters appearing in the *kontakion* – I just want to draw attention to the dramatically expanded form of presentation of the described events.

From 22<sup>nd</sup> stanza to the end, which is the 24<sup>th</sup>, followed by a beautiful prayer of Mary for the people:

Τρεῖς αἰτήσεις δὸς τῇ γεννησάσῃ σε·  
 ὑπὲρ ἀέρων παρακαλῶ σε  
 καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν καρπῶν τῆς γῆς καὶ τῶν οἰκούντων ἐν αὐτῇ·  
 διαλλάγηθι πᾶσι... (22)  
 Σῶσον κόσμον, σωτήρ· τούτου γὰρ χάριν ἤλυθας·  
 στῆσον πάντα τὰ σὰ... (24)

The motif of prayer from the author-narrator, who prays on behalf of himself and the people, is found frequently in the last verse or strophes of kontakia (therefore forms of the first person plural and pronouns “we” often occur in these stanzas). Here Mary is praying, or one of the characters „performing” in the work. This has a very deep theological sense: she prays to the one who is Intercessor, Help of Christians, Mother of God and of the human race. This conclusion is justified by the Gospel content.<sup>26</sup>

The refrain of the kontakion of Christmas: παιδίον νέον, ὁ πρὸ αἰώνων Θεός is spoken by the main character different from the narrator, by repeated cries of Mary and the Magi, to the words of little children about themselves, in order to explain what the appearance of the star means. Words of the refrain, due to the fact that they are embedded in various forms of expression – apostrophes, travel reports, questions, simple narration in the indicative – there are first in the vocative and then in the nominative, but because of the grammatical gender in Greek (*neutrum*) and the use of a variant form of the vocative of Θεός, they sound the same, for example:

ὁδηγέ μου, υἱέ μου, ποιητά μου, πλουτιστά μου  
 παιδίον νέον, ὁ πρὸ αἰώνων Θεός – vocative<sup>27</sup> (24);

and

συνήκαμεν ὅτι ὄφθη  
 παιδίον νέον, ὁ πρὸ αἰώνων Θεός – nominative (4).

In the work about the sacrifice of Abraham<sup>28</sup> there is a dialogue with Sarah, but an imaginary one: Abraham imagines what Sarah would say, but these are basically all the time considerations in his mind – *soliloquia* on the way up the hill, where he has to make a sacrifice of

<sup>26</sup> Cf. J 19, 26b-27a.

<sup>27</sup> In the later Greek the article ὁ also had the function of the vocative.

<sup>28</sup> SCh 99, 3.

the son. R. J. Schork comments the technique as follows: „Sarah’s potential reactions are then reported in direct discourse for five stanzas, after which Abraham comments on her words – all within his speech to God”.<sup>29</sup> Thus the words of the refrain: ὅτι μόνος ἀγαθὸς ὁ σωτὴρ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν, as if the Sarah’s words are quoted by Abraham. Sara expresses here her opposition to the command of God, in a natural way for the mother rebels against such a cruel fate prescribed to her son, whereas the words of the refrain somehow soften its stance. The 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> strophes are a good example of these considerations:

Ἄκούσει τους λόγους σου πάντας ἢ Σάρρα, ὃ δέσποτά μου,  
καὶ τὴν βουλήν σου ταύτην γνοῦσά μοι λέξει·  
Εἰ αὐτὸς ὁ διδους ἐλάμβανε, τί παρέσχηκε;  
(...)

οὐ πιστεύω σοι το τέκνον, οὐ δώσω σοι  
ὅτι μόνος ἀγαθὸς ὁ σωτὴρ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν. (7)  
Βραχυν καιρὸν ζήσουσα, τούτῳ συζήσω· μετὰ τὸ θανεῖν,  
ἐὰν θελήσης τοῦτο δρᾶσον ἐν αὐτῷ·  
μὴ λείπη με καὶ λύπη κτεῖνη με, σοῦ αἰτέομαι. (8)

Isaac comes to the real discussion with his father, but against the expectations, his attitude does not indicate fear, fright, but in a dignified and mature way, like Iphigenia from the final parts of a drama by Euripides, asks Abraham a question about the truth of his vision (he saw himself as a victim). Isaac even teaches his father that sacrifice should be voluntary. The refrain serves Isaac to confirm his beliefs:

ὦ Πάτερ, κατ’ ἐμοῦ τὴν μάχαιραν ἠκόνησας;  
Βλέπω τύμβον τὸν βωμόν, ὃ γενέτα·  
σὲ δὲ δεσμοῦντα ἅμα καὶ φονεύοντα ἐνοπτρίζομαι...  
μὴ ἄκοντα σφάξις ἴν’ εὐπρόσδεκτον εὕρης  
τὴν θυσίαν σου, ἐμὲ τὸ τέκνον σου·  
ὅτι μόνος ἀγαθὸς ὁ σωτὴρ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν. (18)

A very interesting example of the use of the refrain is a kontakion known as *The Resurrection*.<sup>30</sup> There are a lot of characters in this work, apart from the narrator: a crowd of the wicked (ἀνόμων λαός), Pilate, guards, and even underground beings (οἱ κατωτέρω). These latter are

<sup>29</sup> Schork, 1966, p. 277.

<sup>30</sup> SCh 128.

part of the narrator's story about struggle of Christ with the personified death and its cry is quoted:

καὶ ἔνδον πόλεμος ἦν τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν θάνατον...  
 τοῦ μὲν ἀρπάζοντος τοὺς κάτω,  
 τοῦ δὲ τοῖς κατωτέρω βοῶντος... (13)

Everyone (the crowd, Pilate, guards) repeat the refrain: ἀνέστη ὁ κύριος.<sup>31</sup> Their στατεμεντο αρε προχεδεδ βθ της σταγε διρεχτιονσ λικε λέγοντες, φησίν and what is very engaging, considering the meaning of the refrain, these statements of the song were composed by the author in such a way that the refrain always applies to them – or it is preceded by any objections, as in the case of Pilate:

Ὁ Πιλᾶτος ἀκούσας φησὶ πρὸς αὐτούς (...)  
 θάψαντες ἄφετε τὸν νέκυν,  
 οὐ γὰρ κλέπτεται οὐδέ, ἂν μὴ ἀναστῆ, ἐκβοήσωσιν·  
 «ἀνέστη ὁ κύριος» (7);

or “hope” and fear of the godless crowd:

ὅτι γὰρ οὐκ ἀναστήσεται ἀνέγνωμεν καὶ ἐπέγνωμεν (...)  
 εἰ δὲ οὗτος Θεὸς ἐστίν, εἴπωμεν·  
 «ἀνέστη ὁ κύριος» (6);

or wonder or question of the guards:

Τίς ὁ λέγων οὐαί, καὶ τίς κράζει τό εὐ, καὶ τίνων αἱ φωναί·  
 «ἀνέστη ὁ κύριος» (16).

In this kontakion there are mentioned also some people not immediately appearing, but their words are quoted by the “*dramatis personae*” – for example, the voice of an Angel or Christ himself, whose statement of the Resurrection is quoted by the Jews as his own: μετὰ τὰς τρεῖς ἀναστήσομαι.

Romanos the Melodist wrote two kontakia on the Gospel parable of the 10 virgins.<sup>32</sup> Comparison with *Thecla's Hymn* would be interesting due to the similarity of the content, but they are not in any particular manner more similar to the song than other kontakia. There is, of course, a common theme, the Gospel parable, but it is not enough to say

<sup>31</sup> It is dubious if the Death is crying ἀνέστη ὁ κύριος too, because there is a *lacuna* in the text before the word βοῶντος.

<sup>32</sup> I omit here the analysis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> kontakion of 10 virgins, because J.H. Barkhuizen has interpreted this hymn in the paper: Barkhuizen, 1993, pp. 39-54.

with certainty that the *Thecla's Hymn* was the inspiration for the Romanos to take this topic. Romanos in many kontakia had drawn from the Gospel parable. This inspiration lies, in my opinion, in the construction of the refrain – including it into the content and syntax of the preceding stanza – and the idea was applied by Romanos the Melodist for all his works. Kontakion I of 10 virgins<sup>33</sup> has a very large entrance – as many as three *prooimia*, a few verses of authorial comment on the importance of parables and explain its meaning through a variety of metaphors (this style which we could call long-winded, really resembles the style of Melito of Sardis, which as far as it is known is also one of the Greek patterns kontakion). From the 11<sup>th</sup> stanza begins only a dialogue between maidens, interspersed with the author's commentary. Much more complex, perhaps because of the dramatic situation, is the statement of the “stupid” virgins: they ask for the opening of the door, provide for their virtues; they mainly speak of Christ. The refrain τὸν ἄφθαρτον στέφανον is repeated by both groups of girls, Christ and the author-narrator. These words, as can be seen, are part of the sentence, so are always very closely connected with the preceding statement, positive or negative, for example: πᾶσι παρέχει... (*Pro. I*); Χριστε ὁ Θεός, δώρησαι ἡμῖν... (*Pro. II*); ἵνα καὶ σχωῶμεν... (in many stanzas); ὥστε μὴ ἔχειν (6).

Such a dramatic construction of liturgical works (homilies) could be of Syriac provenance and it follows a general tendency of the eastern patristic literature. The Syriac poetic genre closest to kontakion is *sogita*, in which “characteristic is the use of alphabetic acrostics and a selection of the dialogic-dramatic elements: each strophes are performed by two people running a dialogue, the chorus was performed respectively by two halves of the choir”.<sup>34</sup> A reading of Ephraim's poetry, however, shows that the dialogues of his songs are much less diverse than the dialogues of Romanos, for example; they are usually of the same length and parts of each characters are assigned to one stanza, appearing alternately. Moreover, the chorus usually expresses the author's statement and is not grammatically and lexically associated with

<sup>33</sup> SCh 283.

<sup>34</sup> Reczek, 1985, pp. 361-362. On the other hand, scholars find parts of dialogues or *sililoquia* as derived from classical drama (Longosz, 1996, pp. 268).

the content of the preceding verse. Songs of Ephraim, though beautiful and having very deep theological and religious content, in terms of the structure are much less complicated and refined than the songs of Romanos the Melodist.<sup>35</sup>

The conclusions that arise from these analyses are as follows – several ways of introducing the refrain by Romanos can be distinguished:

- through the stage directions: an example is kontakion *The Resurrection* and this is the form that Methodius also uses;
- the inclusion of the refrain in a previous statement so that it creates a syntactic-semantic whole, which is an apostrophe, question, end of sentence (*The Christmas, On the Ten Virgins*);
- loose syntactic connection with the strophe, without *didaskalium*, linked by a conjunction (e.g. ὅτι); this kind of chorus is rather a commentary on the content of stanza or its conclusion (*The Sacrifice of Abraham*).

All of these techniques seem apparent in many works, although in some of these the dominant one is the first one, in the other the second one, while the third method occurs rarely. *Thecla's Hymn* has a similar symmetrical structure as the kontakia of Romanos the Melodist. In Methodius of Olympus apostrophes and stanzas of lyrical nature dominate over the narrative, nevertheless these wrap around a part of the narrative, which both in Romanos and in Methodius is a central piece. This structure is of course a reflection of the universal structure of the hymn, starting from *Homeric Hymns*, which essentially boils down to three parts: apostrophe, pars media and the final prayer.<sup>36</sup> The similarity in the structure of works of Romanos the Melodist and *Thecla's Hymn* of Methodius of Olympus is clear, but in my opinion, the most important issue is the refrain woven into the narrative-dialogic part. The overall structure may have roots in *Homeric Hymns*, in the case of Romanos in the songs by Ephrem and in the layer of rhetoric – in homily of Melito of Sardis, but the concept of the refrains, which are

<sup>35</sup> I have read the Ephrem's poems only in Polish and French translation: De Nisibe, 1968; 2001; 2006; Św. Efreń, Cyryllonas, Balaj, 1973.

<sup>36</sup> Regarding the tripartite structure of a hymn, see Danielewicz, 1976; Furley, 1993, pp. 21-41; 1995, pp. 29-46.

repeated by various characters, may come just from *Thecla's Hymn*. Methodius of Olympus put the refrain into the mouth of positive heroes – when referring to “stupid” virgins – Thecla speaks of them and the refrain is not associated with any of their statements, they do not sing the refrain, but it is sung by the “coryphaeus”. The most original idea of Romanos the Melodist is to arrange the refrain in such a way that it is repeated by all the characters appearing in the “drama”, even the villainous ones. In Methodius of Olympus however, “stupid maidens” have shut their mouths, but to Romanos the Melodist as a rule the words of the refrain are repeated by even those such as Pilate and the Jews, or just the girls, who have forgotten the oil. Thanks to that, his *kontakions* became more dramatic in dimension, regardless of whether they were performed by actors – as characters of “drama”, or only by the coryphaeus and a choir.

One of the Greek sources of works of Romanos the Melodist can thus be *Thecla's Hymn* from Methodius' *Symposion*, or at least its closest structural model. The refrain of Methodius of Olympus is new to the Christian poetry, it is not used regularly or was not used at all by his immediate successors, as Gregory of Nazianzus or Synesius. In Romanos it is a regular feature of the *kontakion* and although the existence of Syriac sources is possible also for refrain, many examples show that Romanos not only knew Methodius of Olympus, but took from him the original idea of singing the refrain by the various characters.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Argárate, P., 2007, 'Kathodos eis Haiden: Infernal Drama in Romanos Melodos' Kontakia', *33rd Annual Byzantine Studies Conference abstracts. University of Toronto, October 2-14, 2007*, Irvine, DC.
- Barkhuizen, H., 1993, 'Romanos the Melodos, «On the Ten Virgins» (48 OXF=51SC)', [in:] *Acta Classica*, Vol. 36, pp. 39-54, [on-line] <http://www.casa-kvsa.org.za/1990/AC33-02-Barkhuizen.pdf>, (accessed Feb. 18, 2014).
- Bonner, C., 1940, 'The Homily on the Passion by Melito, Bishop of Sardis', [in:] *Studies and Documents*, Vol. 12.

- Bril, A., 2005, 'Plato and the Symptotic Form in the «Symposium» of St Methodius of Olympus' [in:] *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 279-302.
- Conca F., 2001, 'Il linguaggio classico nella poesia religiosa bizantina', *Rendiconti Classe di Lettere e Scienze Morali e Storiche*, Vol. 135, fasc. 2, pp. 235-246.
- Danielewicz, J., 1976, *Morfologia hymnu antycznego. Na materiale greckich zbiorów hymnicznych*, Poznań.
- Św. Efreem, Cyrillonas, Balaj, 1973, *Wybrane pieśni i poematy syryjskie*, tłum. W. Kania, Warszawa, Pisma Starochrześcijańskich Pisarzy, t. 11.
- Furley, W., 1993, 'Types of Greek Hymns', *Eos*, Vol. 81, pp. 21-41.
- Furley, W., 1995, 'Praise and Persuasion in Greek Hymns', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 115, pp. 29-46.
- Grosdidier de Matons, J., 1973, 'A propos d'une édition recente du ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΠΑΣΧΩΝ', *Travaux et memoires*, No. 5, pp. 364-365.
- Grosdidier de Matons, J. (ed.), 1964-1981, *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes*, t. 1-5, Paris, Sources Chrétiennes 99, 110, 114, 128, 283.
- Karavites, P., 1993, 'Gregory Nazianzinos and Byzantine Hymnography', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 113, pp. 81-98.
- Koder, J., 2001, 'Antikebezüge bei Romanos dem Melodem?', *Wiener Humanistische Blätter*, Vol. 43
- Longosz, S., 1996, 'Zalążki dramatu chrześcijańskiego w literaturze patrystycznej', *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, t. 44, nr 3.
- Longosz, S., 1997, 'Homilie dramatyczne z zalążkami dramatu chrześcijańskiego', [in:] S. Bielecki, H. Ordon, H. Witczyk (red.), *W posłudze słowa. Księga Pamiątkowa ks. J. Kudasiewicza*, Kielce.
- Maas P., and Trypanis, C. A., 1963, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina*, Oxford.
- Montserrat-Torrents J., 1986, 'Origenismo y Gnosis: Los 'Perfectos' de Metodio de Olimpo', *Augustinianum*, Vol. 26, No. 1/2, pp. 89-101.
- Musurillo H., V.-H. Debidour (eds.), 1963, *Méthode d'Olympe*, Le Banquet, Paris, Sources Chrétiennes 95.
- De Nisibe É., 1968, *Hymnes sur le Paradis*, transl. R. Lavenant, Paris, Sources Chrétiennes, 137.
- De Nisibe É., 2001, *Hymnes sur la Nativité*, transl. F. Cassingena-Trévedy, Paris, Sources Chrétiennes, 459.
- De Nisibe É., 2006, *Hymnes Pascales*, transl. F. Cassingena-Trévedy, Paris, Sources Chrétiennes, 502.
- Pellegrino, M., 1958, *L'inno del Simposio di s. Metodio Martire*, Torino.
- Praet D., 2010, 'Susanna, the Fathers and the Passio Sereni (BHL 7595-6). Sexual Morals, Intertextuality and Early Christian Self-Definition', *Zeit-*

- schrift für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 556-580, [on-line]: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/ZAC.2010.30>.
- Reczek, J., 1985, 'Posłowie', [w:] M. Starowieyski (red.), *Muza chrześcijańska, t. I: Poezja armeńska, syryjska i etiopska*, M. Bednarz et al. (ed.), Kraków s. 361-362.
- Simić, K., 2011, 'Kassia's Hymnography in the Light of Patristic Sources and Earlier Hymnographical Works', *Зборник радова Византолошког института / Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'études byzantines*, Vol. 48, pp.7-37, [on-line]: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2298/ZRVI1148007S>.
- Schork, R. J., 1966, 'Dramatic Dimension in Byzantine Hymns', *Studia Patristica*, Vol. 8.
- Swart, G., 1990, 'The Christus Patiens and Romanos The Melodist: Some Considerations on Dependence and Dating', *Acta Classica*, Vol. 33, pp. 53-64.
- Wellesz, E., 1943, 'Melito's Homily on the Passion. An Investigation into the Sources of Byzantine Hymnography', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 44, pp. 41-52.
- Wellesz, E., 1949, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, Oxford (Polish edition: *Historia muzyki i hymnografii bizantyńskiej*, Kraków 2006, p. 206-211).
- Zorzi, B., 2003, 'La reinterpretazione dell'eros platonico nel Simposio di Metodio d'Olimpio', *Adamantius*, No. 9, pp. 102-12.