

The Chanting Art in the COVID-19 Era

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Introduction

As various studies have shown, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is a major concern for a large part of society at European and global level. Thus, a high percentage of the population in most European countries report that their economic situation has deteriorated; other citizens have lost their jobs or seen their working hours reduced, and more generally there has been a change in working conditions, both in terms of hours and time, as many employers have opted for remote working¹. In particular, the culture and art sectors of the economy have been more affected than others, due to the ban on the operation of cultural venues, cultural events of all kinds, as well as the operation of shops selling cultural products and objects. The most serious consequences have been observed in the performing arts, with music suffering the greatest damage². The fact that the cultural sector is highly anthropogenic and therefore the supply of its services has been interrupted has significantly contributed to this. In addition, the health crisis has left the cultural sector substantially unprepared for technological change. Finally, citizens' precautionary savings have

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1. Ζωή, *ἐργασία και COVID-19: Πρώτα πορίσματα – Άπρίλιος 2020*, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/el/publications/report/2020/living-working-and-covid-19-first-findings-april-2020> [22-2-2022].

2. Giorgos Agorastakis, *Ἡ χαμένη Τέχνη: Μετρώντας τὸν καταστροφικὸ ἀντίκτυπο τῆς Covid-19 στὸν πολιτισμὸ μας*, <https://mikisguide.gr/i-chameni-techni-metrontas-ton-katastrofiko-antiktupo-tou-covid-19-sto-politismo-mas/> [22-2-2022].

reduced the demand for cultural goods, since they are regarded as luxury goods rather than necessities³.

COVID-19's Influences on the Chanting Art

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the operation of the churches⁴, i.e. the places where the chanting art is performed, as their operation was suspended by rolling Government Decisions from 16 March 2020 to 10 April 2020⁵, while they started to operate under restrictions under new Government Decisions from 11 April 2020 onwards⁶. At the same time, the operation of all educational institutions and establishments, including the Byzantine Musicology and Choral Studies Departments⁷

3. Panagiotis Petrakis, «Πολιτισμός και Covid» *Τὰ Νέα*, 23-11-2020 and <https://www.euractiv.gr/section/koinoniki-eyropi/opinion/politismos-kai-covid/> [22-02-2022].

4. For a general picture regarding Covid-19's influence on Church, see Chrysostomos Savvatos (metrop.), *Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἡ πανδημία τοῦ Covid19*, Kalamata 2020; Hierotheos (metr. of Nafpaktos and Hagios Vlassios), *Ἐκκλησία καὶ πανδημία. Ὁ ἰὸς sars-cov-2 καὶ ἡ ἀσθένεια covid-19*, Birth of the Theotokos Monastery (Pelagia), 2021; Christos Garavelas, *Ἐκκλησία καὶ Covid-19: Ἕνας δύσκολος χρόνος*, <https://ipolizei.gr/ekklhsia-kai-covid19/> [22-2-2022]. For Covid-19's influence on the functioning of the religious structures globally, see D. Burke, *What churches, mosques and temples are doing to fight the spread of coronavirus*, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/14/world/churches-mosques-temples-coronavirus-spread/index.html> [12-1-2022] and C. Parke, *Churches cancel Sunday service, move online amid coronavirus outbreak*, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/coronavirus-update-church-sunday-service-online> [12-1-2022].

5. «Ἐπιβολὴ τοῦ μέτρου τῆς προσωρινῆς ἀπαγόρευσης τῆς τέλεσης κάθε εἴδους λειτουργιῶν καὶ ἱεροπραξιῶν στοὺς θρησκευτικούς χώρους λατρείας γιὰ τὸ χρονικὸ διάστημα ἀπὸ 16.3.2020 ἕως 30.3.2020», *Φ.Ε.Κ.* 872/Β/16-3-2020, pp. 9587-9588.

6. «Παράταση ἰσχύος τῆς κοινῆς ἀπόφασης τῶν Ὑπουργῶν Παιδείας καὶ Θρησκευμάτων καὶ Ὑγείας μὲ ἀρ. 2867/Υ1/16-3-2020 (Β' 872) ἕως τὶς 11.4.2020», *Φ.Ε.Κ.* 1082/Β/29-3-2020, p. 11309.

7. «Ἐπιβολὴ τοῦ μέτρου τῆς προσωρινῆς ἀπαγόρευσης λειτουργίας τῶν βρεφονηπιακῶν καὶ παιδικῶν σαθμῶν, νηπιαγωγείων, σχολικῶν μονάδων, ἀνωτάτων ἐκπαιδευτικῶν ἰδρυμάτων, κέντρων ξένων γλωσσῶν, φροντιστηρίων καὶ πάσης φύσεως ἐκπαιδευτικῶν δομῶν, φορέων καὶ ἰδρυμάτων, δημοσίων καὶ ιδιωτικῶν, κάθε τύπου καὶ βαθμοῦ τῆς χώρας γιὰ τὸ χρονικὸ διάστημα ἀπὸ 11.3.2020 ἕως καὶ 24.3.2020», *Φ.Ε.Κ.* 783/Β/10-3-2020, pp. 8501-8502. See also Sotirios Despotis, «Ἀπολυτήριες ἐξετάσεις καὶ Covid-19», <https://www.pemptousia.gr/video/apolitiries-exetasis-ke-covid-19/> [22-2-2022].

was suspended. Finally, organizing all events, including scientific conferences, musical events, and festivals, through which all arts and subjects, including the Chanting Art and the science of Byzantine Musicology, were promoted and disseminated, was prohibited⁸.

a) The effects of COVID-19 at the religious level

These conditions have affected the field of chant, as they have affected other activities, creating problems at the religious/spiritual, psychological/emotional, social, cultural/artistic, and economic levels. In particular, between 16-3-2020 and 10-4-2020, a temporary ban was imposed on performances of all types of services and rituals in all but religious places of worship⁹. This decision deprived believers of the right to participate in religious worship and priests of the right to sing in sacred services¹⁰. Thus, during this period it was not possible to carry out the religious duties of both believers and the religious and professional duties of the chanters; this had a catalytic effect in creating spiritual problems, especially during a period of increased “spiritual obligations” in the Church, such as Lent. Moreover, the same situation has hurt the psychology of both the faithful and the chanters, many of whom experienced for the first time the compulsory withdrawal from their lecterns¹¹.

b) The effects of COVID-19 at the educational level

At the educational level, the COVID-19 pandemic harmed the promotion of chant, as all kinds of educational activity was suspended; thus,

8. For Covid-19's influence on culture, see Agorastakis, *ibid.*, Petrakis, *ibid.*, and Karen Davies, “Festivals POST covid-19”, *Leisure Sciences*, 43, 1-2 (2021) pp. 184-189.

9. During this period only the celebration of the funeral service in the presence of a limited number of worshippers was allowed.

10. Concerning the situation that has emerged on an international level see Constanța Cristescu, “Anul monodiei liturgice The Year of the Liturgical Monody”, *Tabor* 9 (2020), pp. 75-76.

11. See f. Nikolaos Loudovikos, «Κοινωνία – πανδημία – Έκκλησία». *Συνέντευξη στην Ειρήνη Καρύδη*, <https://www.moneyandlife.gr/koinonia-pandimia-ekklisia/> [22-2-2022]. See also: Stephen M. Modell – Sharon L. R. Kardia, “Religion as a Health Promoter During the 2019/2020 COVID Outbreak: View from Detroit”, *Journal of Religion and Health*, 59 (2020) <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10943-020-01052-1>.

university musicology departments, church academies, music schools, conservatories, and schools of Byzantine music had to suspend their operation and ceasing their teaching activities, which were later resumed either by teaching through the Internet¹² or under special conditions, as provided for by the existing legal provisions¹³. Thus, chanting as an Art and Science ceased to be taught and disseminated.

c) The effects of COVID-19 at the cultural and economic level

The effects of COVID-19 extended to the artistic-cultural level. As it is well known, Chanting Art is also promoted through extra-curricular events and the publication of digital and printed material, which can influence the community of various religious and cultural traditions¹⁴. Through a variety of cultural activities, chant emerged as an art comparable to other Byzantine arts that existed during the Palaeologan period, while chant production continued during the years of Ottoman rule¹⁵. In addition, the musical culture of Byzantium and the musical tradition of Hellenism are promoted, Byzantine and post-Byzantine musicians and their musical works are made known, and the public is allowed to come into contact with an important aspect of the Orthodox tradition. At the same time, as with the performance of the chant in worship, ideas,

12. Ministry of Education, «Ἐφαρμογή τῆς ἐξ ἀποστάσεως ἐκπαίδευσης στὰ Ἀνώτατα Ἐκπαιδευτικὰ Ἰδρύματα», 16-3-2020. For distance learning as an education medium during COVID-19, see Ioannis Zaimakis – Marina Papadaki, *Τηλεκπαίδευση ἐκτάκτου ἀνάγκης σὲ συνθήκες πανδημίας τῆς Covid 19: Ἡ ἐμπειρία φοιτητῶν/τριῶν τῆς Σχολῆς Κοινωνικῶν Ἐπιστημῶν τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Κρήτης*, <https://www.soc.uoc.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/erevna.pdf> [12-1-2022].

13. «Ἐπανάρξηση καὶ κανόνες λειτουργίας δομῶν τῆς καλλιτεχνικῆς ἐκπαίδευσης», *Φ.Ε.Κ.* 1867/16-5-2020, p. 19220.

14. Already since the first half of the 20th century, events have been organized, during which Chant Choirs present members of Byzantine and post-Byzantine composers (μελουργῶν) to promote the Art of Chant. Over time, these events were incorporated into cultural festivals, while later on, festivals and “Byzantine choir meetings” were also held, with an exclusive focus on the art of chanting. Nowadays, similar events take place in Greece and abroad. In addition, musicological conferences are organized, and their programs include musicological papers related to Byzantine music but also conferences with purely Byzantine-musicological content, in which choirs of chanters participate.

15. Dim. Balageorgos, «Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ μουσικὴ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη», *Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια Μείζονος Ἑλληνισμοῦ* : <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=11048> [22-2-2022].

and emotions are cultivated, derived from the poetic and hymnographic texts, sung during the above events and activities. In addition, like other cultural goods, chant can contribute to developing intercultural dialogue and cultural diplomacy, the free movement of ideas, the fight against violence and racism, the promotion of cultural exchanges, and the circulation of artistic chanting groups¹⁶. The suspension of church and cultural institutions, as well as the cessation of all types of economic and cultural activity has resulted in the nullification or cancellation of events and festivals related to chant, with a direct impact on the benefits that can be derived from the promotion and dissemination of the art of chant, as mentioned above.

Finally, the effects of COVID-19 can also be found at the economic level. The absence of worshippers from the churches created, as was to be expected, a reduction in their income' this naturally led to their under-utilization and –in many cases– the inability to pay salaries to staff, including chanters¹⁷. At the same time, the teachers of Byzantine music, conservatories, and Byzantine music schools suffered financial losses, and until measures that have been taken to limit the spread of the pandemic were lifted, they remained out of the classroom. Finally, the suspension of the operation of educational and cultural institutions had a direct financial impact on their revenue and their general operating situation.

16. Nik. Vasileiadis, Sofia Boutsiouki, *ibid.*, pp. 143-144. See also Eirini Balomenou, *Ἡ Βυζαντινὴ Μουσικὴ ἀντηχοῦσε γιὰ πέντε μέρες στὸ Ἱάσιο τῆς Ρουμανίας*, <https://helleniculturaldiplomacy.com/> [22-2-2022]; Panagiota Siapkari, «Θεσσαλονικεῖς Ὑμνωδοί»: Προσφέροντας πολιτιστικὴ διπλωματία μέσω τῆς Ψαλτικῆς, <https://www.helleniculturaldiplomacy.com> [22-2-2022].

17. In particular, with respect to the social and economic consequences of Covid-19 on the functioning of churches see f. Evangelos Feggoulis, «Ἐκπέμπουν SOS οἱ Ἐνορίες, τραγικὲς οἱ συνέπειες τῆς πανδημίας», <https://www.romfea.gr/katigories/10-apopseis/41997-ekpempoun-sos-oi-enories-tragikes-oi-sunepeies-tis-pandimias-> [22-2-2022].

Epilogue

As can be seen from the above, the Chanting Art was affected in many ways by the health crisis, following the rest of the cultural goods. In particular, the effects of COVID-19 on it became evident on a devotional-religious, spiritual, psychological, educational, cultural, and economic level. All of the above proves that the Chanting Art, despite its specific character as a cultural good, generally follows the cycle of cultural goods and is more or less influenced by broader social, economic, and cultural developments.