Φως ιλαρόν: FROM THE VARIOUS SETTINGS THROUGH
THE HISTORY OF ECCLESIASTICAL CHANT TO THE LATEST
COMPOSITION BY PROF. GREGORIOS STATHIS

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Vespers is the first service of the day. The liturgical books prescribe the order and the poetic
text of the vesperal hymns. The musical codices called Papadikes, covering the cycle of offices,
put in order the hymns of the Great Vespers “Composed by various poets”. The main function
of the Vesper service as expressed in its prayers and its fixed psalmic parts are the praise of God
for the end of the day and prayers for the night.

One of the basic hymns of the Vespers is Φως ιλαρόν, is chanted at the entrance of the priest.
The way the hymn is described in the manuscripts includes some of its general characteristics:
“old poem”, “anonymous author”, “epilychnios hymn”, “epilychnios thanksgiving.” The
designations “an ancient melos” or “very ancient” recorded in much of the religious and
historical literature summarize the general acceptance of the hymn’s ancient origins.

This certainty is based on considerable historical evidence:
1. Included among the devotional and liturgical items of the Papyri from Oxyrhynchus
(Egypt) collection that belongs to the British Museum is a small, unidentified fragment of a
hymn, numbered as 244 (p. Lond. Inv.2037B). It is dated to the sixth or seventh century. The
hymn is usually found in this reconstructed form:¹

   1. [Φώς ιλαρόν δόξα εἰς Θεόν ἔδηξεν]
      [πατρός ὑπερόντος]
      [τὸν μάρτυρα Παύλου]
      [Christo]
   2. [Ἐλέησέ ἡμῖν ἐπὶ τὴν ἁλίζον γίνεται]
      [ἐν τῷ ἐπὶ τῇ πληρωματίᾳ τοῦ]
      [θεοῦ]
   3. [Ἀκοῦσον ἡμῖν ἐπὶ τὰ καθαρὰ]
      [καὶ τῇ ἔμμενοι καὶ αἰώνιοι]
      [σε δόξασαι]

   Joyous light of the holy glory
   of the immortal Father, heavenly,
   holy, Jesus Christ;

   Having come to the sun’s setting
   (and) beholding the evening light,
   we praise God, Father, Son
   and Holy Spirit.

   It is fitting at all times that you
   should be praised with auspicious
   voices, Son of God, Giver of Life;
   Wherefore the world
   glorifies You.

¹ “The fragment is part of two lines from the top of a document and is described as a ‘strip of papyrus, 3 cm x 13.8 cm’.
It is written along the fibres in a sloping uncial hand of Coptic type. On the verso are the remains of a ‘Byzantine protocol’. […]
It was published for the first time in 1927, by H.J.M. Milne in his Catalogue of Literary Papyri in the British Museum. The piece was
later identified by J. Sykutris in his review of the Catalogue in Deutsche Literatur – Zeitung 49 (1928), col. 1508. Sykutris, however,
did not provide a reconstruction of the fragment.” see Antonia Tripolitis, ‘ΦΩΣ ΙΛΑΡΟΝ’ ANCIENT HYMN AND MODERN
2. The testimony of St Basil (330–379) in his work “On the Holy Spirit” to Amfilochius from Iconio. According to this testimony, St Basil records the use of the hymn during his time and tells us the name of the composer. In this case the martyrdom of the hymnographer Athinogenis, a contemporary of Clement of Alexandria, in 196 A.D., is the latest terminus ante quem for the date of birth of Φως ιλαρόν.\(^2\)

**USE DURING THE LITURGICAL YEAR ACCORDING TO THE TYPIKON**

The rubrics, hymns and biblical texts of Vespers are recorded in most of the liturgical books of the Church. Information about cathedral or monastic use is found in the appropriate Typika, while further such information can also be found in the music books. In the kosmikon and asmatikon as well as in the monastic Typikon, the effort to highlight the importance of feasts through the ritual is clearly visible.

The oldest reference to the hymn Φως ιλαρόν concerns its liturgical use according to the monastic Typikon; this information comes from the 12th century, and can be found in the Typikon of Messina Gr.11, dating from the year 1131:\(^3\) “On Holy Friday, Holy Saturday and during the vigils, Φως ιλαρόν is chanted by the priests instead of by the canonarch or the monks.”\(^4\)

During the first quarter of the 15th century – that is, before the conquest of Thessaloniki by the Turks in 1430 – a great codex was written: the Typikon of Symeon, National Library of Greece no. 2047, revealing and rescuing a great deal of the order of the kosmikon Typikon (with a great deal of information defining the elements of worship, which by employing the form of a symbolic drama unfolds through a complex system of entrances, exits, processions and pilgrimages within and outside the churches). According to Symeon, Φως ιλαρόν was chanted “slowly and with melos” by all the priests on the Great Asmatic Vespers.\(^5\)

Φως ιλαρόν: the ancient melos. A compilation of the musical manuscripts

Shortly after the fall of Constantinople, at some point during the second half of the 15th century, the priest Ioannis Plousiadenos, in his handwritten musical codex Sinai gr. 1312 gives us the information that Φως ιλαρόν is always chanted at the service of the Asmatic Vespers but not in those in honour of the Theotokos.\(^6\)

2  “[…] ο μεντοι λαος αρχαίαν αφίησι την φωνήν και ουδενί πώποτε ασεβείν ενομίσθησαν οι λέγοντες «αινούμεν πατέρα και υιόν και άγιον πνεύμα θεού „Ει δε τι και τον ύμνον Αθηνογένους έγνω, ον ώσπερ τι εξιτήριον τοις συνούσιν αυτώ καταλέλοιπεν, ορμών ήδη προς την δια πυράς τελείωσιν, οίδε και την των μαρτύρων γνώμην όπως είχον περί του αγίου πνεύματος» βλ.Αλέξανδρου Σ. Κορακίδου δρος Θ. Αρχαίοι ύμνοι: 1. Η ΕΠΙΛΥΧΝΙΟΣ ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΙΑ “Φως ιλαρόν αγίας δόξης…”, Αθήναι 1979, 28.

3  12th century: Typikon Of Messina Gr.11, dated 1131: “[Τετ. Α’ Νηστειών]: Οι αδελφοί αάλλαν Φως ιλαρόν αγίας δόξης.” In chronological order there follow:

13th century: ΤΥΠ. ΑΓ. ΣΑΒΒΑ (Σινά 1097 του 1214), DIMITRIEVSKY III 401 [Αγρυπνία]: Οι μοναχοί το Φως ιλαρόν. ΕΥΧΟΛΟΓΙΟΝ Πάτμου 105 του ΙΓ’ αι. , DIMITRIEVSKY II 161: “Είτα ο λαός Φως ιλαρόν” [Πρβλ. ΕΥΧΟΛ. Σινά 966 του ΙΓ’ αι., DIMITRIEVSKY II 206].

14th century: ΔΙΑΤ.ΙΕΡΟΔΙΑΚ.ΦΙΛΟΘΕΟΥ (του 1347), PG 154, 753 [Αγρυπνία]: και ευθύς ο μεν προεστώς ή ο ταχθείς μοναχός ψάλλει το, Φως ιλαρόν. Οι δε αναγνώσται, αίροντες πάλιν τας λαμπάδας, προπορεύονται μέχρι των αγίων θυρών. ΤΥΠ. ΑΓ. ΣΑΒΒΑ (Παρισίων 385 14th century.), DIMITRIEVSKY III 189 [Προηγηθεσμένη]: Ο ψάλτης Φως ιλαρόν.

ΤΥΠ. ΑΓ. ΣΑΒΒΑ (Βατοπ 320 [931] του 1346), DIMITRIEVSKY III 426: Ο δε ταχθείς μοναχός αφ’ εσπέρας ειπείν τον Προοιμιακόν ψαλμόν, ούτος άρχεται τον Κύριε εκέκραξα, λέξει το Φως ιλαρόν, το Καταξίωσον, το Νυν απολύεις.

Σπυράκου Ευαγγελία, Οι χοροί ψαλτών κατά την Βυζαντινή Παράδοση. Μελέται, αρ.14, Ι.Β.Μ., Αθήνα 2008, ΚΕΦ.4.3. Μοναχικός εσπερινός, 263–299.

4  Σπυράκου Ευαγγελία, Οι χοροί ψαλτών κατά την Βυζαντινή Παράδοση. Μελέται, αρ.14, Ι.Β.Μ., Αθήνα 2008, 457.

5  E.B.E. 2047 (1st quarter of 15th century), 8v and 146r–148r.

6  Σινά 1312 (15th c.) ΠΑΠΑΔΙΚΗ – ΑΝΘΟΛΟΓΙΟ ΜΑΘΗΜΑΤΑΡΙΟΥ, σημειογραφία: μέση πλήρης, χργφ. Ιωάννου Πλουσιαδηνού (;), 28r […] 30r.

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in the older version of the hymn in a musical manuscript from the 16th century, Anthologia no. 1238 from the Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos.

During the 17th and the 18th centuries, the hymn was included in many music codices. The majority of them are found in Monasteries in Mount Athos but also at the Monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai, and in Monasteries at Meteora. In every case there is the indication that Φως ιλαρόν is chanted “at the entrance during Vespers”, in the 4th mode.

Mention should also be made of the manuscript from Xenophontos Monastery on Mount Athos, nr.114 (mid-18th century) an Anthologion in which, on 38v after the setting of Φως ιλαρόν there follows “έτερον (another) Φως ιλαρόν”. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find a photograph of this source which might reveal if the second is a case of early exegesis or an effort at a new composition.

THE EXEGESIS OF THE HYMN (FROM THE OLDER NOTATION)

Exegesis of this hymn exist by Petros Peloponnesios and by his student Petros Byzantios. The hymn continued to be set in the older exegetic notation in manuscripts from the beginning of the 19th century (1800–1810) before the invention and imposition of the New Method of analytical notation. During this period exegeseis were also made by the Monk Theophanis Pantokratorinos and by Apostolos Konstas from the island of Chios.

THE TRANSLATION OF THE HYMN IN ROMANIAN (IN THE NEW METHOD OF ANALYTICAL NOTATION)

Φως ιλαρόν was set in its Romanian translation during the first half of the 19th century by Anton Pann, “a romanianized student of scholarly Greek” as Dionysios Photinos (1777–1821) wrote, “a great composer and skilful pianist”, “one of the most important historians of his time”. Photinos was a contemporary of the three creators of the new method (Gregorios Protopsaltis, Chourmouzios Chartofylax and Chrysanthos of Madytos) and was taught by the same teachers as they. In the late 19th century, Φως ιλαρόν was also included in numerous Romanian manuscripts, mainly from the Monastery of St Paul on Mount Athos, by Nektarios Vlachos, chanter at the Romanian Skete of St John the Baptist on Mount Athos (he was a student of the Three Teachers and fellow student of Ioasaph Dionysiatis, Nikaolaos Vatopedinos and Nikolaos Docheiaritis).

Of the three teachers and inventors of the new analytical notation imposed by the Patriarchal Declaration in 1815 and taught at the 4th Patriarchal Music School, an exegesis was made only by Gregorios Protopsaltis and was first published in the Tameion Anthologias of Gregorios Protopsaltis in 1837 in Constantinople, edited by his student Theodoros Phokaeas.

THE APPEARANCE OF Φως ιλαρόν IN BOOKS IN THE NEW NOTATION

From the third decade of the 19th century onwards there are numerous examples of “Φως ιλαρόν” in the new analytical notation. Most of them are described as “ancient melos”, “ancient chant” or “ancient melos and poem”, “anonymous” or “unknown poet”. In all these cases I am referring to the single Φως ιλαρόν transferred from the older, oral, tradition to written tradition through a variety of musical manuscripts. I stress that in all musical manuscripts before the new analytical method notation, the hymn is chanted in the 4th mode. During the course of the notation of the hymn in the New Method, however, it is apparent from the sources that there were differences in the way the melos begins; while mode 2 was usually employed (beginning on Δι), the fourth was as well, but using the martyria of the second mode. It also appeared in Bucharest in the chromatic 4th mode (ήχος δ’ χρωματικός).

With the appearance of the hymn in the new analytical notation, the original indication of the 4th mode for its performance fell almost into disuse; at some point the circle of the use of the “ancient melos” of Φως ιλαρόν in the manuscript tradition came to a close.

7 The hymn “Φως ιλαρόν” in musical manuscripts of the 16th century: Ἰβήρων 1238 (mid-16th c.) ΑΝΘΟΛΟΓΙΑ, 47v.
**Other Examples of Settings of the Hymn (in the Written Tradition)**

In the millennium-long journey of the history of Byzantine and post-Byzantine chant, there was only one other case of setting the hymn to music, on the island of Crete during the famous “Cretan Renaissance”.

1. **The 1st-mode Setting from the Composers of Cretan Renaissance (Ars Nova)**

With the burgeoning art of chanting on the island of Crete during the period 1566-1669, there arose a considerable number of new composers with new ideas and, consequently, a large number of new compositions, many with free and fifteen-syllable verses. “At Vespers, and at the end of compositions of the Papadikes, the Cretans chanted the ancient ecclesiastical compositions established by the Asmatic books long before, and many of their own, which betray their care for correct and glorious celebration of Orthodox worship according to the Typikon. Besides the old compositions they create their own exemplary melodies [...]”. Although Φως ιλαρόν was never traditionally an object of experimentation in terms of its musical setting or performance, the Cretan composers surprise us.

At the end of the 16th - early 17th century Demetrios Tamias, protopsaltes in Crete, presented a new setting of the hymn in the 1st mode with the inscription ‘dichoron’ (to be chanted by two choirs antiphonally), with the indication that the two choirs must chant together from “Διό ο κόσμος...” to the end of the hymn. 8 In the first half of the 17th century a Cretan monk, Kosmas Varanis, presented another new setting in the 1st mode, 9 as also dis the priest Alesios Vikimanos, from Chandakas. 10 There is also a 1st-mode settings by Theodoros Kalamaras, deacon (1658) and later priest (1662).

Like Vikimano’s setting, those by Demetrios Tamias Theodoros Kalamaras, are also for two choirs, with the indication that the last phrase, “διο ο κόσμος”, is to be chanted by both choirs simultaneously.

As is clear from above, the setting of this hymn in the 1st mode and for two choirs is a phenomenon unique to Crete (a pure example of Ars Nova), and was not followed by composers elsewhere.

2. **The Setting of Φως ιλαρόν by Konstantinos Protopsaltes**

More than two centuries after the example of the Cretan composers, in the first half of the 19th century in Constantinople, lived Konstantinos, (student of Georgios of Crete, domestikos from 1800), Protopsaltes of the Patriarchate for more than 30 years (1821 - 1855). For the first time in Church history, and at the demand of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Germanos wrote a series of eleven settings of Φως ιλαρόν. There are eight (one in each mode), one in echos legetos starting on Βου, another in plagal second mode starting from Δι and the eleventh an οκτάηχον (in all 8 modes), starting from Πά of the 1st mode, characterized as “μέλος ανάμικτον στιχηραρικόν”, all preserved in manuscript no. 1036 from the Monastery of Panteleimonos on Mount Athos (early 19th century), an Anthology, written in the new method of analytical notation by Nikolaos Docheiarites., on folios 9r–21r.

In 1845, the first volume of the Tameion Anthologias by Konstantinos Protopsaltes was issued by the Patriarchal printing house. It is not known why, in the printed edition, only eight (one in each mode) of the eleven settings are printed. Konstantinos Protopsaltes was known for showing respect for tradition. The new settings Φως ιλαρόν can be characterized as Ars Nova in that they break the boundaries of tradition, according to which the hymn would only be

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8 Εμμ. Γιαννόπουλος, Η άνθηση της Ψαλτικής Τέχνης στην Κρήτη (1566 – 1669), Μελέται 11, Αθήνα 2004, σελ.199, Sinai 1417 f. 37α.
10 Εμμ. Γιαννόπουλος, Η άνθηση της Ψαλτικής Τέχνης στην Κρήτη (1566 – 1669), Μελέται 11, Αθήνα 2004, 244, National Library of Greece (E.B.E.) no. 963.
in the 4th mode). Nevertheless, the compositions show an absolute respect for the lines of the tetrachord of each mode. The composer himself, in the introductory note to the printed edition, stresses that the new compositions (melopoiimata) are based on the “those eternal standards” of the chant of the Great Church of the Patriarchate.

In 1847 Theodoros Papa-Paraschou Fokaeus, a student of the Three Teachers and also the new director of the Patriarchal printing house, published in his Mousiki Melissa two settings of his own of Φως ιλαρόν (in the 4th mode starting from Bου and one in plagal 2nd mode).

3. Printed sources of the original “ancient hymn Φως ιλαρόν and the “western standard” setting by Ioannis Sakellaridis

The first time the original ancient hymn Φως ιλαρόν was published in exegesis was by the teacher Gregorios Protopsaltes in 1837 in the Tameion Anthologiás, published by Theodoros Fokaeus in Constantinople. This was followed by the edition of 1850 in the first volume of the four-volume Pandekti (published by Stephanos Domestikos with Ioannis Lampadarios). In 1896 Agathangelos Kyriazidis issued in Constantinople Εν ανθός της καθ ημάς Εκκλησιαστικής Μουσικής, in which Φως ιλαρόν is again published as an “ancient melos”, but this time “reedited by Georgios Raidestenos” in the 2nd mode starting on Δι. In 1909, again in Constantinople, Georgios Progakis, music teacher at the famous Theological School of Halki, brought out the three-volume Μουσική Συλλογή. The setting of Φως ιλαρόν in the 2nd mode starting on Δι, slightly more refined than that by Raidestinos, was printed with the inscription “As sung in the Theological School at Halki”. The musical text is marked “tetrasimos” (four-beat measure) and it is divided into “tetrasima”.

In the first Athenian edition of Φως ιλαρόν, in Мουσικός Πανδέκτης, published by the ‘ΖΩΗ Brotherhood’, for historical reasons the version of the ancient compositions revised by Raidestenos, in the 2nd mode starting from Δι, was used. The publisher’s comment, placed below the first page of the musical text with an asterisk, confirms the general atmosphere of tension between Greek and Western culture to be felt in the capital of the newly established Greek State, with the western-style governance of Bavarian kings, in the arts in general as well as in psaltic art:

This hymn, although an ancient melos and therefore worthy of attention, appears to be impossible for listeners to appreciate, on account of the length and uniform repetitions of the same lines and phrases and lack of separation. The result is drab and tedious and not suitable for singing. We submit this only as a music lesson and add below another brief one that we consider more appropriate for Church use.

This setting, “more appropriate for Church use”, was none other than the short syllabic setting by Ioannis Sakellaridis, in the 2nd mode starting on Δι, but with a clear resemblance to the C major scale of European music. Over the next decades and still today, it is the most easily digestible, simplest setting by Sakellaridis that is heard in the majority of Greek Orthodox churches, at least those in urban centres in which the priest desires the congregation to participate in the chanting.

4. The new setting of Φως ιλαρόν by Gregorios Stathis

The question of the “difficulty” of the ancient version prompted Professor Gregorios Stathis to pay attention to the need to return to “those eternal standards” that had been kept alive for more than a millennium by thousands of Byzantine and post-Byzantine composers. Experience of many decades in the study of sacred music, through the manuscript tradition in its original form, gave rise to a masterpiece that returns to the original sound of the 4th mode, as it was chanted for centuries and passed from generation to generation. On hearing the hymn, the tripartite poetic structure of the hymn, in accordance with the text, is immediately perceived. The number of spondees balances with the equally shared syllables, which, depending on the meaning of the words, always match evenly. The venerable melos of the “epilychnios thanksgiving” returns
not only as the musical text of an original composition, but also as a “reset”, and therefore it maintains the features of the truly ancient melody, an ancient “original” with a carefully combined new melos that constitutes an *Ars Nova* unique in the annals of the history not only of the psaltic art, but of music as a whole. The slow tempo of the melody responds to every word of the hymn. The tradition that the “ancient melos” should be in a slow tempo is fully implemented, thus highlighting its deepest inner melodic rhythm. The absolute tranquillity and harmony that is emitted by the evening light and the tranquillity of the perpetual prayer at the end of the would not be possible with anything less than octametres and spondees. The melos flows quietly and seamlessly; in the relationship between tempo and melos each syllable is extended by 2, 4 or 8. In addition, the conscious repetition of similar melodic lines and shorter musical arcs facilitates easier memorization of the hymn, thus ensuring that it will be chanted easily during Vespers. The absolute respect of the composer for the lines of the main tetrachord of the 4th mode gives the feeling of a classical Byzantine setting.

**Live recordings of the Hymn Φως ιλαρόν composed by Gregorios Stathis:**


**Acknowledgement**

The setting Φως ιλαρόν composed by Gregorios Stathis, Professor of Byzantine Musicology at the National Kapodistrian University of Athens, is to be published in his book Γρ. Στάθη, ΤΑ ΜΕΛΟΠΟΙΗΜΑΤΑ. I am most grateful for his kind permission to publish his composition here (see Appendix).
Ὁ ἐπιλύχνιος ύμνος «Φῶς ἱλαρόν»
μέλος Γρηγορίου Στάθη

Δι ἡμέρας ἡ Φως ἤματος ἔδωκεν ἵλαρον

Α' μέρος

β' μέρος

Γρηγορίου Στάθη, Μελοποιήματα

Appendix
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Ιερών Μονών των Μετεώρων. ΙΒΜ, Αθήνα 2006.

**THEORY BOOKS**

Χρύσανθος εκ Μαδύτων, Θεωρητικόν Μέγα της Μουσικής, Εν Παρισίοι 1821.

**PUBLICATIONS OF MUSICAL BOOKS**

ΜΟΥΣΙΚΟΣ ΠΑΝΔΕΚΤΗΣ, ήτοι πλήρης συλλογή των εκλεκτοτέρων μουσικών μαθημάτων, των εν ταις πρωϊναίς και εσπεριναίς ακολουθίαις της εκκλησίας ψαλλομένων (πλην όσων περιέχει το Αναστασιμάταριον), μετά πολλής επιμέλειας καταρτισθείσα, προς χρήση των την ιεράν υμνωδίαν εν τω Ναώ ασκούντων και παντός φιλομουσικού, ΤΟΜΟΣ ΠΡΩΤΟΣ, ΕΣΠΕΡΙΝΟΣ – ΑΠΟΔΕΙΠΝΟΝ, έκδοσις τέταρτη, Αδελφότις Θεολόγων η «ΖΩΗ».

ΠΑΝΔΕΚΤΗ της ιεράς Εκκλησιαστική Υμνωδίας του όλου ενιαυτού, εκδοθείσα υπό Ιωάννου Λαμπαδαρίου και Στεφάνου Α΄ Δομεστίκου της του Χριστού Μεγάλης Εκκλησίας, Τόμος 1, Περιέχειν τα μαθήματα του Εσπερινού, εν Κωνσταντινουπόλει 1850.

Στάθη Γρ. Φως ιλαρόν – Γρ. Στάθη, ΤΑ ΜΕΛΟΠΟΙΗΜΑΤΑ (forthcoming)

ΤΑΜΕΙΟΝ ΑΝΘΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ περιέχον απαθανάτιον την Εκκλησιαστικήν ενιαύσιον Ακολουθίαν του Εσπερινού, Όρθρου, Λειτουργίας της Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστής και της λαμπροφόρου Αναστάσεως, έτι δε και οκτώ καλοφωνικούς ειρμούς εν τω τέλει. Ακριβής ανατύπωσις από την έκδοσιν της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως του έτους 1845, ΤΟΜΟΣ Α΄, εκδόσεις Β.Ρηγόπουλου, Θεσσαλονίκη.

ΤΑΜΕΙΟΝ ΑΝΘΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ, Τόμος Α΄, ΑΚΟΛΟΥΘΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΣΠΕΡΙΝΟΥ, Τεύχος Α΄, ακριβής ανατύπωσις των υπό Θεοδώρου Φωκαέως ανθολογηθέντων μαθημάτων του Εσπερινού, εκδόσεις Β. Ρηγόπουλου, Θεσσαλονίκη.

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