

NINA-MARIA WANEK, *Cultural Transfer of Music Between Byzantium and the West: The Case of the Chants of the So-Called Missa Graeca* (Byzantina Australiensia 27). Leiden: Brill 2024. xxiv+661 pp. – ISBN 978-90-04-51307-5 (€ 239.00 excl. VAT)

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NINA-MARIA WANEK has written an engaging and thoroughly researched study of a fascinating, yet often overlooked, area of liturgical music history. Her monograph investigates the complex interactions between Byzantine and Western musical traditions, focusing on the enigmatic ‘Missa Graeca’, a collection of chants whose origins and transmission have long sparked academic controversy. WANEK’s work goes beyond simple melodic cataloguing; it provides an in-depth examination of the cultural, social, and musical influences that shaped the development and dissemination of these chants, shedding light onto the intricate processes of musical exchange and adaptation between the Byzantine and Western worlds.

The book’s strength lies in its multifaceted approach. WANEK masterfully interweaves historical context, rigorous musicological analysis, and detailed liturgical scholarship into a vivid narrative of the Missa Graeca’s journey. She starts by providing a solid historical framework, outlining the erratic interactions that occurred between Byzantium and the West, highlighting periods of intense cultural exchange alongside instances of conflict and isolation. Understanding the complex and selective processes by which musical ideas were passed down requires this contextual basis. The author provides compelling evidence for the roles played by political alliances, diplomatic missions, and the movement of individuals – clergy, pilgrims, and musicians – all contributing to the spread of musical traditions and practices.

At the outset of her narrative, WANEK places the Missa Graeca in the larger context of medieval liturgical traditions. The Missa Graeca, which appeared in Western manuscripts as early as the eighth century, kept its distinctive character by inserting Greek theological texts into Latin liturgical frameworks. WANEK’s research is focused on several chants: Gloria (Δόξα), Credo (Πιστεύω), Sanctus (Ἅγιος), and Agnus Dei (Ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ). Their use in Western liturgy raises questions of cultural transmission and adaptation.

WANEK clearly outlines the historical contexts that allowed for such chants to be adopted into Latin practice. She draws upon previous scholarship to establish that Byzantine influences affected Western music through various channels – most notably through monastic networks that transcended geographical borders. These networks, predominantly Benedictine, were a means of transmitting liturgical texts and music and so created hybrid practices that mixed Latin and Greek traditions.

WANEK's analysis of the regional spread of the *Missa Graeca*, which she relates to the sociopolitical circumstances of medieval Europe, is among the book's most interesting parts. She ascertains the chants were most popular between 950 and 1050 because monastic communities had different administrative systems and liturgical practices in different places. This fits with more general historical accounts of how music and power interact to shape church practices.

WANEK's book is divided into chapters that cover all aspects of the *Missa Graeca*, from its origins to performance practice, and to adaptation in local contexts. By means of thorough analysis of manuscripts from Southern and Central France, St Gall, Bavaria and Byzantium, she highlights the significant differences in performance practice and offers new insights into the multifaceted use of chants.

Furthermore, WANEK challenges the view of the *Missa Graeca* as mere musical curiosities and argues instead that they should be seen as part of medieval liturgical innovation. By looking at the relationships between Greek and Latin traditions she shows the complex interdependence of these cultures and regards the *Missa Graeca* not as an import but as a construction resulting from cultural negotiation and adaptation. One of the strengths of WANEK's work is her multi-faceted approach, musicological, textual and historical. She uses paleographical analysis alongside a thorough survey of the existing scholarship, and weaves together primary sources with a theoretical framework that addresses historical questions. Her references to the *Missa Graeca*'s primary manuscript witnesses support her arguments and present a collation of texts that helps to clarify the evolution and adaptation of these chants over time.

A remarkable aspect of WANEK's study is her examination of the music itself. She rejects simplistic narratives of direct borrowing or imitation and acknowledges the complex processes of adaptation and transformation that occurred in the transfer of musical ideas. Her analysis of melodic contours, rhythmic patterns, and modal structures shows how Byzantine chants were

reinterpreted and incorporated into a Western liturgical context. Her observations of melodic similarities and differences allow her to track the evolution of specific chants across different manuscripts and geographical areas, and provide evidence for her arguments about transmission routes and processes of adaptation. This level of musical scrutiny takes the study beyond historical narrative and offers a rich and detailed musicological perspective that surpasses mere comparisons. WANEK's investigation of the influence of specific Byzantine melodies on the *Missa Graeca* is particularly interesting, as it challenges the idea of a one-way cultural exchange. Instead, she argues that musical adaptation was a dynamic process that created new forms of expression and reveals the rich tapestry of medieval liturgical experience.

WANEK investigates the performance practices of the *Missa Graeca* chants. She examines how these chants were inserted into the liturgical calendar, especially during outstanding feasts such as Pentecost, when the invocation of the Holy Spirit required a deeper connection to the Greek texts. This makes scholars consider the liturgical motives for using Greek texts and the intentions that lay behind their performance.

WANEK's performative dimension compares the reception of the Greek hymns in different monastic centers and shows how the *Missa Graeca* was adapted to local customs and universal ecclesiastical standards. She traces the oral traditions that shaped the performance practices and shows how the *Missa Graeca* developed regional flavours that reflected the identity of the communities that adopted them.

WANEK's examination of the notational practices of the *Missa Graeca* reveals the complexities of transcription and its effects on performance. The problems of neume notation in early manuscripts are part of the bigger story of liturgical music in medieval Europe. There, oral traditions intersect with written practices.

Beyond the music itself, WANEK looks at the social and cultural contexts in which the *Missa Graeca* chants were performed and received. She examines patronage, liturgical practice, and the changing religious and political landscape, as well as their influence on the chants' reception and adaptation. Such considerations are crucial for understanding cultural transfer. By looking at broader social and cultural contexts, WANEK provides a rich picture of the interaction between music, religion, and politics.

WANEK's treatment of the very term '*Missa Graeca*' is especially thorough. She tackles the problems head on and acknowledges certain inconsis-

tencies and ambiguities. By looking at the historical usage of the adjective 'Graeca', she shows how musical categories were fluid and ambiguous in the past. This recognises the limitations of historical categorisation and the complexity of past musical practice. WANEK admits that there is no clear evidence of a straightforward linear transmission and proposes instead a more gradual process of assimilation and adaptation drawing on a wide range of sources and perspectives. This sensible and thoughtful approach enriches her conclusions.

WANEK is exceptional at engaging with the existing scholarship. She has a thorough and respectful conversation with the research on the *Missa Graeca* and related topics. She critiques various interpretations and hypotheses and weaves her own findings into the conversation. WANEK acknowledges other scholars but offers new perspectives and insights and adds a lot to the subject.

WANEK looks at bilingual manuscripts with Greek and Latin texts which show the syncretic nature of liturgical practice in the Middle Ages. They serve as testaments to the intellectual curiosity of monastic communities and to their endeavor to bridge the linguistic divides between Greek theological traditions and the Latin liturgical framework.

WANEK's analysis of bilingual texts, especially bilingual psalters and sacramentaries, gets at the heart of her argument: education and the transmission of Greek traditions. She compares the study of bilingual texts to the practices within monastic education that sought to make Latin-speaking clerics literate in Greek. This was part of a broader cultural desire for inclusivity in worship. WANEK's statistics on literacy in monastic communities provide a counter-narrative to the assumption that such communities were homogeneous. Her research shows ups and downs in literacy and cultural engagement. Monasteries were often hubs of theological and musical innovation rather than static institutions stuck in one tradition.

WANEK's work is generally very detailed. Her arguments are supported by loads of primary sources: manuscripts, archival documents, liturgical texts. She documents her sources thoroughly, with descriptions and interpretations. The book is full of musical examples and facsimiles of manuscripts which help to clarify the musical and historical context. WANEK's clear and precise wording makes even the most complex musical analysis accessible to a wider audience. Her book is a great resource for specialists and beginners alike. The combination of detail and clarity makes it enjoyable and informative.

In sum, *Cultural Transfer of Music Between Byzantium and the West* forms a major contribution to historical musicology and liturgical studies. It offers a thorough and well-researched examination of a previously neglected part of medieval music history. With her attention to musicological analysis, historical context, and a nuanced understanding of the transfer process, WANEK has made a landmark in scholarship. Her monograph is a major step forward in understanding the *Missa Graeca* and a model for future research on similar cross-cultural musical phenomena. Her critical approach highlights the need for continuing conversation in the study of three separate fields: music, theology, and culture.

This book is a must-read for anyone interested in Byzantine music, Western liturgical music, intercultural musical exchange, or early music and culture. Its erudition, clarity, and insights will set a standard for future research on the East-West interface. WANEK shows that a great deal can be achieved through interdisciplinary research and through a close look at the details of musical transmission.

**Keywords**

ecclesiastical chant; Byzantine music; cross-cultural exchange