

A CRITICAL REVIEW AND QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF ROMANOS THE MELODIST'S HYMNOGRAPHICAL CORPUS

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Abstract: URBANO-RUIZ, Miriam. *A Critical Review and Quantitative Study of Romanos the Melodist's Hymnographical Corpus*. This article has three main objectives. Firstly, it presents a review of some of the specific bibliography on the Byzantine hymnographer Romanos the Melodist (5th-6th century). Secondly, it discusses the traditional views about his hymnical corpus and systematises the main studies on his life and literary production, which belong to the past century, while updating the existing material by examining the diachronic course of research from the discovery of his first hymns to the present day. It also discusses the different taxonomies that have been applied to the poems of this author and, finally, it analyses the compositional data of both the genuine and the spurious part of his work, extracting percentages that can be very useful in making definitive judgements about the possible authorship or not of the Melodist, together with other criteria such as the form of the text, the content, the sources used or the style of each *kontakion*. Such a quantitative study of the *Cantica* of Romanos the Melodist has not yet been undertaken.

Keywords: *Romanos the Melodist, kontakia, bibliography, review, hymnographical corpus, quantitative analysis*

1. Introduction

The name of Romanos the Melodist is one of the most famous in the literary field of hymnography. Born around 485 AD, the poems he wrote at the beginning of the sixth century are known by the term *kontakion*. The *kontakion* is a kind of verse-sermon, and corresponds to a type of hymn which finds its origin in Syriac literature. The rhetorical and narratological structure of this hymn is tripartite: the introduction or invocation, the plot, and the denouement and final prayer. This tripartition corresponds to the formal structure, which has very clear defining elements, such as the proem, the stanzas, the hirmus – a metrical pattern based on the combination of tonic and atonic syllables –, the refrain and the acrostic.

Eighty-nine of Romanos' *kontakia* have survived to the present day, and his work can be classified according to several criteria. The first of these is the authenticity of the texts. Thus, Romanos' corpus is divided into two large parts: the *Cantica genuina* and the *Cantica dubia*. This is the classification followed by the Melodist's main editors, Maas – Trypanis. Other authors however, make a subdivision according to content. Thus, the hymns focus on Christological, *Old Testament*, *New Testament*, circumstantial and hagiographical themes.

To these ways of understanding the Melodist's work, two other must be added, taking into account, on the one hand, the integrity of the hymnic text and, on the other, the nature of the poems. From each of these points of view, the assessments lead again to a bipartite division of the work. In the first case, Romanos' work is divided into complete and fragmentary surviving poems. In the second case, it is divided into actual hymns and liturgical poems that do not fit exactly into the formal requirements of the *kontakion*. The categories mentioned here are by no

means rigid, and the same poem may fall into more than one of them. It is noteworthy that the hymns dedicated to episodes on the life of Christ form the bulk of the hymnographer's work and, perhaps, its centre.

A final way of classifying the hymns is mentioned in connection with the hagiographical *kontakia*, but it can apply to the entire corpus of the Melodist. For Maas – Trypanis (1970, X), the tone of the text is remarkably distinctive and comes together in three types of poem. On the one hand, the encomiastic type, composed under the influence of rhetorical *encomium* (Maas 1906, 33). On the other hand, there are the narrative *kontakia*, and, finally, those of a mixed character.

This article will briefly discuss the character and content of the research published relating to Romanos the Melodist and his literary production. It will also attempt to analyse the nature of the majority of the scholarly production about the *kontakia* composed by this hymnographer and the role that these works occupy in the studies of the author and his work, so that the reader will be able to discern the degree of contribution that they have in the field of hymnography. Finally, a quantitative study of Romanos' *Cantica genuina* and *Cantica dubia* is offered by analysing the compositional elements of his poems, such as the number of proems and stanzas, the acrostic, the hirmus or the refrains, among others. The result of this work can be considered as a short guide for those who want to start studying the hymnography of Romanos the Melodist from scratch.

2. Romanos the Melodist's hymnographical corpus

2.1. Editions and translations

Some of Romanos the Melodist's *kontakia* were first published in the late 19th century by Cardinal Pitra (1867; 1876; 1888), Christ – Paranikas (1871) and Papadopoulos-Kerameus (1897). After Pitras's death the work of editing was taken up by Krumbacher (1899; 1900; 1902; 1903; 1907; 1911) and his pupil Maas. A considerable number of hymns remained unpublished until Cammelli (1930), Carpenter (1936), Mioni (1937; 1958) and Trypanis (1968), and even then there was no complete edition of the Melodist's poems. This task was entrusted to the Greek professor Tomadakis, who undertook the process of reading the manuscripts and reconstructing the original texts in the middle of the 20th century (1952-1961) with the help of some of his students, to which Livadaras (1959) adds the edition of the Greek text of 4 *kontakia* at the end of his Doctoral Thesis. However, it was Trypanis (1963; 1970) who became the first scholar to succeed in editing the entire corpus of Romanos on the basis of the earlier material compiled by Maas. Trypanis, together with Maas, published the poems of Romanos in two volumes: one in 1963 (*Sancti Romani Melodi cantica. Cantica genuina*) and the other in 1970 (*Sancti Romani Melodi cantica. Cantica dubia*). Between 1963 and 1970 Grosdidier also began editing the Greek texts, publishing the first volume in 1964 and continuing this task until 1981. Years later, in the 21st century, some modern editions appeared, such as the Greek of Tziatzi (2009; 2010) and Papagiannis (2013-2014). The first translations in German are by Krumbacher (1907; 1911), and later, by Koder (1996; 2005-2006). These were followed by Italian translations by Cammelli (1930), Gharib (1981), Schognamiglio (1985), Maisano (2002a) and Mangogna – Trombi (2007), and the French versions of the text by Khawam (1956), Decarreau (1958), Grosdidier (1964-1981) and Bigel (2014). In English, those of the 1970s by Carpenter (1970; 1973) and Moskhos (1974) and later by Schork (1995) and Barkhuizen (2000; 2008) stand out. In the early 2000s, the Catalanian translation was published by Janeras, Camps i Gaset and Grau (2005), followed by the Spanish versions by Merino Rodríguez (2012; 2013) and Urbano-Ruiz (2019; 2022a; 2022b; 2023).

2.2. Some specific works on Romanos' *kontakia*

Besides the traditional and major works on the life and work of the hymnographer (Livadaras 1959; Mitsakis 1965; 1967; Grosdidier 1977; Van Rompay 1993), specific studies of Romanos' *kontakia* began to proliferate after the initial work of reading and editing the manuscripts. For example, in the 20th century, Trypanis (1971; 1972) has published some articles with comments on metre and rhythm in the Melodist's opera or the study of specific words in his poems, although a little bit earlier, Baud-Bouvy (1938) also focused on the metrical aspect of Romanos' *kontakia*. In the 70's, Dalmais (1972) focuses on the Syriac background and Greek symbolism in the biblical hymns composed by Romanos. Later, Barkhuizen (1986a; 1986b; 1989; 1991; 1992; 1993a; 1993b; 2000; 2005; 2008) initiated the analysis of specific hymns and also established a compositional pattern in the proems, epilogues and refrains (1989). Studies focusing on specific hymns are also published by Catafygiotou Topping (1968; 1977; 1978; 1982) and Van Ommeslaeghe (1980). By the end of the 20th century, Gatier (1983) focuses on establishing a reasonably accurate date for the composition of some hymns, following the attempt of the Oxonian editors (Maas 1906; Maas – Trypanis 1963, XIX-XX) and Grosdidier (1977, 243-245). Also, Maisano's articles examine the reception of the Melodist's work in the West (1993), focuses on certain formal aspects of his hymns (2002b), and discusses the biblical (2004) and patristic sources of the hymns (2006).

The production becomes richer once the 21st century approaches. Varghese (2006) studies the propagandistic background of some texts, as does Koder (2008), who also revisits the concept of *oikonomia* in the *kontakia* (2018). Krueger (2004; 2013) and Gador-Whyte (2017; 2020; 2021) focus their research on the theological domain and examine some of the poems from a rhetorical point of view, as do Krueger (2003), Cresci (2007a; 2007b; 2014), Eriksen (2012; 2018) or Mellas (2017; 2020). Arentzen (2013), Gador-Whyte (2013) and Peltomaa (2007; 2010; 2015) delve into the Marian background of Romanos' hymnody; Frank (2005) and Arentzen (2017) interpret some aspects that are metaphorically related to the theological realm, and Mulard (2016) studies the symbolism of the genuine hymns written by Romanos. With Schork (1962) as predecessor, Prelipcean (2015) explains the use of typology in hymns with *Old Testament* content, and Khachidze (2018) studies the transmission and translation into Georgian of Romanos' *kontakion* on Adam's lament. Individual studies on specific hymns are also published, for example, by Saylor Rodgers (2014), Kuper (2019), Dzwigala (2020), Urbano-Ruiz (2020; 2021a; 2021b; 2022a; 2022b; 2023), Boned (2021) or Camps Gaset (2021). Finally, Cunningham (2021) notes that the reception of Romanos in the homiletics and hymnography of the middle Byzantine period is an area in which much remains to be done, although Louth (2005) had previously devoted a paper to the development and treatment of certain themes in hymnography from the Melodist to John Damascene.

As it can be seen from this brief review of the bibliography on Romanos' corpus, most studies focus on the content of the work or on the sources of specific poems and their expression. The number of papers dealing with the compositional elements of the *kontakia* is smaller, and focus on the analysis of the metrical patterns, language and vocabulary. There is a lack of detailed study of all the compositional elements of the *kontakia* together as a whole in Romanos' *Cantica genuina* in contrast with the *Cantica dubia*. This analysis can contribute to the study of his work from the point of view of its authenticity and can lead to some very interesting conclusions.

3. Analysis of Romanos' *kontakia*

3.1. Material sources for the work of Romanos the Melodist

The sources for the Melodist's hymns are a list of manuscripts known as *kontakaria*. According to the canonical edition of Romanos' corpus, these *kontakaria* are divided into primary and secondary codices. This taxonomy is based on whether or not they contain the text in its entirety. Maas – Trypanis (1970, XIV-XV) count up to fourteen primary and nineteen secondary codices on which they base their edition. Grosdidier (1964, 24-44) also gives an account of these manuscripts, although he adds one which he calls N (1964, 28; 1977, 218-220) and follows the same primary-secondary classification. However, he is more thorough in this task and gives a more detailed description of the *kontakaria* he works on, following the earlier model of Mioni (1937, 56-61), who also briefly describes them. Cammelli (1930, 76-80) gives some notes and an outline of what he considers to be the stemma of the manuscripts. Mioni (1937, 67) is more exhaustive in his attempt to sketch the stemma of the Melodist's *kontakaria* and goes into somewhat more detail in his comments on each (1937, 53-68). Both Italians follow the primary-secondary subdivision mentioned above but they also speak of the subdivision into families, which Merino Rodríguez (2012, 21-22) later takes up in his introduction to the Spanish translation. Likewise, Tomadakis in his edition names the manuscripts he follows and pays particular attention to the two volumes from Patmos, devoting an entire volume to them in 1954, together with the *kontakaria* from Sinai in 1957. The provenance of all this material is varied. They are preserved in Rome (2), Messina (1), Turin (1), Grottaferrata (6) and Venice (2); Vatican (7); Mount Athos (3) and Patmos (2); Sinai (4); Moscow (2); Vienna (1); Paris (1); Jerusalem (1).¹

In addition to all these manuscripts containing Romanos' work, a search in *Pinakes* revealed 16 codices that had not previously been considered or mentioned in any study. With the exception of two that date from the 11th-12th centuries, all of them are late, after the 14th century. They are the following:

- 1) Wien, ÖNB, jur. gr. 18, s. XI.
- 2) Vaticano, BAV, Vat. gr. 1871, s. XII.
- 3) Wien, ÖNB, jur. gr. 15, s. XIV.
- 4) Vaticano, BAV, Vat. gr. 711, s. XIV.
- 5) Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Library, MS 47, s. XIV-XV.
- 6) London, British Library, Arundel 527, s. XV.
- 7) Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. II 126 (coll. 440), s. XV.
- 8) Istanbul, Patriarchikê Bibliothêkê, Hagia Trias 31, s. XV.
- 9) Istanbul, Patriarchikê Bibliothêkê, Panaghia 41, s. XVI.
- 10) Sinai, Monê tês Hagias Aikaterinês, gr. 976, s. XVI-XVII.
- 11) Meteora, Monê Barlaam 113, s. XVII.
- 12) Hagion Oros, Monê Megistês Lauras K 13, s. XVIII.
- 13) Kecskemet, Orthodox Központ Hagiosz Nikolaosz 928, s. XVIII.
- 14) Sparte, Mouseio Ekklesiastikês Technês, Monê Hagiôn Tessarakonta 58, s. XVIII.
- 15) Hagion Oros, Monê Hagiou Panteleêmonos 659, s. XIX.
- 16) Hagion Oros, Monê Hagiou Panteleêmonos 660, s. XIX.

¹ For the specific nomenclature of each codex, see the works cited above.

The most important testimonies for the corpus of hymns attributed to Romanos the Melodist are two codices preserved in the library of St John the Theologian on the island of Patmos, registered under the numbers 212 and 213. Although Krumbacher (1903, 78; 1907, VII) distinguishes the two volumes by the initials he assigns to them, P and Q respectively, Maas – Trypanis (1970, XIV) assign the same letter (P) to both. The other editors follow Krumbacher's decision. As for its content, apart from the brief notes by Mioni and Grosdidier, it is studied in detail by Tomadakis (1954) and subsequently described by Arentzen – Krueger (2016), who also present a codicological analysis in which they update some of the data on P and Q.

However, the manuscript series constituted by the *kontakaria* is not the only documentary source for the hymns of Romanos, and the existence of papyri transmitting his work is rarely mentioned. Maas – Trypanis (1963, XXVII) only mention one, although more are now known:

- 1) Pap. gr. Vind. 29430; contains a fragment of *the Hymn on the Three Children* (no. 46). Dated by Maas – Trypanis (1963, XXVII) to the 6th century and edited by Maas (1939). Zuntz (1965) presents an analysis of it and, from its handwriting, places its chronology probably in the 7th century. He also provides his own version of the text. Zuntz (1965, 464) and Porter – Porter (2002, 136) refer to it as P. Vindob. G 29430 and state that its chronology actually lies between the 6th and 7th centuries, a fact accepted by Arentzen – Krueger (2016, 650). This is the first papyraceous fragment of Romanos to be published.
- 2) P. Amst. I 24; contains a fragment of the *Hymn on the Nativity II* (no. 2). Identified by Brunner (1993, 185) as P. Amsterdam Inv. Nr. 198. Brunner gives a description of the papyrus and states that it is a page from a codex. He also adds his version of the text. Porter – Porter (2002, 136) note that this is the second of the Romanos papyri to be published and catalogue it under the designation P. Vindob. G 26216. Like Brunner and Porter – Porter, Arentzen – Krueger (2016, 650) consider its date of composition to be between the 6th and 7th centuries.
- 3) P. Vindob. G 26068. Contains a fragment of the *Hymn on the Resurrection of Lazarus I* (no. 14). Together with manuscript Q, it is the only evidence of this *kontakion*, and it was transcribed, edited and annotated in Römer (1995). This third discovered fragment is a leaf of parchment, as also been noted by Porter – Porter (2002, 136). Both works state that the date of composition of this fragment is between the 7th and 8th centuries (Römer 1995, 298; Porter – Porter 2002, 136).
- 4) P. Vindob. G 26225. This is the last testimony found so far and has been collated and studied by Porter – Porter (2002) and a year later by Koder (2003). It transmits the *Hymn on the Entry to Jerusalem* (no. 16). The editors of the fragment note that it is the papyrus with the largest amount of Melodist text and dates from the 6th-7th century.

It is clear from these data that the papyri presented here are in fact the earliest evidence of Romanos' *cantica*.

Romanos the Melodist's manuscript testimonies are composed of a total of 49 codices and 4 papyri. Of all the codices, 14 belong to the primary ones, 19 to the secondary and 16 have not been examined or collated. The following conclusions from these data can be drawn:

- 1) The manuscripts constitute 92% of the physical evidence of Romanos the Melodist.
- 2) The papyri, 8% of Romanos' *kontakia*, contain information that can be very useful in approaching the original text, since they are chronologically very close to the date of the hymnographer.
- 3) Most of his work, 38,78%, has been transmitted in fragmentary form, and if it were not for the primary codices (28,57%) –the least voluminous part of the testimonies– some of his *kontakia* would not be known in their entirety.

- 4) 32,65% of the data have not yet been taken into account because not all of this material has been included in the editions and studies. The impact this may have on the hymnical text is therefore unknown, despite the fact that most of them are late.

3.2. Quantitative analysis of Romanos the Melodist's hymnographical corpus

Among the 89 *kontakia* of Romanos the Melodist, 59 belong to the *Cantica genuina* and 20 to the *Cantica dubia*. In the genuine section, 15 are devoted to celebrations of the fixed calendar and 44 to celebrations of the movable calendar. In the dubious section of the hymns, on the other hand, the situation is the opposite: 26 are for fixed feasts and 4 for movable feasts. The latter is due to the nature of the feasts themselves, since the name day of the saint does not usually vary in date. Thus, 46% of the hymns attributed to Romanos belong to the fixed cycle, while the remaining 54% belong to the movable cycle.

In Romanos' corpus we can find a total of 35 hymns dedicated to episodes from the life of Christ (34 genuine and 1 of dubious authorship); 6 relating to *New Testament* stories (5 and 1); 7 relating to the *Old Testament*; 12 circumstantial *kontakia* (10 and 2) and 29 hagiographical (3 and 26). As can be seen, the majority of the *kontakia* are either Christological (39,33%) or hagiographical (32,58%). Those on the *New Testament* make up 6,74%, those on the *Old Testament*, 7,87% and the circumstance ones, 13,48%.

Subsequently, a quantitative study of the compositional data of the *Cantica* of Romanos is presented.

Of the 59 hymns that constitute Romanos the Melodist's *Cantica genuina*, the most common is the presence of a single proem (64%), although there are also hymns with 2 (22%) or 3 (14%). The maximum number of stanzas is 40 (2%), but most of his *kontakia* have 18 (29%) or 24 (14%), and his shortest hymn has a total of 11 stanzas (3%). Most of the hymns that have the adjective ταπεινός² in their acrostic correspond in many cases (59%) to the formula «τοῦ ταπεινοῦ Ῥωμανοῦ [...]», although it is true that there are more *kontakia* that use this adjectival form to identify the acrostic (5%) –indeed, it has been one of the components that has attracted the attention of scholars on numerous occasions when making value and authenticity judgments about the *Cantica dubia*. All of Romanos' genuine poems have the hymnographer's name as a signature in the acrostic, and only one of them –*Hymn on Joseph I* (no. 43)– is alphabetical, reading all the Greek letters one by one.

Fifty-one *kontakia* (86%) have one-line refrains, while seven (12%) have longer refrains with two lines, and only in one poem (2%) this element is omitted.³ With regard to the modes to which the chanting of the hymns conforms, the plagal modes (61%), especially the fourth and second, stand out, as opposed to the authentic modes (37%). The remaining 2% is made up of one hymn (no. 22) which is intoned according to the mode known as “βαρύς”.

As for their presence in P and Q –considered the “best” testimonies for Romanos' hymns– and according to the data of the Oxonian edition, the following stands out: 56 out of 59 *kontakia* are found transmitted in these *kontakaria* (94,92%). Of them, two hymns have only P as their unique witness and 18 have Q. Thus, 33,90% of the genuine hymns of the Melodist are transmitted by a single manuscript.

The *Cantica dubia* of Romanos the Melodist contain 23 complete poems, all of which belong to hagiographical themes. Of these, 78% of the hymns have a single proem, while the remaining 22% have two options for this element. The longest *kontakion* is made of 33 stanzas, and the

² The total percentage of occurrences of ταπεινός in Romanos' acrostics is 64%.

³ See the *Hymn on Abraham and Isaac* (no. 41).

shortest one, 10. In the acrostic, 39% of the hymns include the adjectival form ταπ(ε)ινός, while 13% of them contain the adjective τάλας. As in the *Cantica genuina*, most of the poems (96%) witness the name of the hymnographer. There is no alphabetical acrostic. As far as the responsion is concerned, most of them are one-line refrains (96%), although there is also one hymn with a two-line one (4%). A total of 7 *kontakia* (30%) change their refrain at some point in the text, resulting in two different variants of this element. The result is a remarkable alternation of this element throughout the stanzas. The musical mode to which the rhythmic-metric patterns of the hymns correspond is not balanced: 61% of the poems follow the authentic or principal chants and 39% the plagal ones.

On the other hand, 25 of the 30 *Cantica dubia* are attested in P and Q (83,33%). In the case of these hymns, the poems find a better situation for their transmission: only 3 of them find a sole manuscript testimony, whether it is P or Q (5,08%). From this fact it can be concluded that they could have enjoyed the sufficient popularity to reach almost massive levels of copying and to ensure their preservation in the face of the vicissitudes of the future of textual transmission.

4. Some final remarks

Obviously, this article does not cover a large number of works devoted to Romanos the Melodist.⁴ An attempt has been made to refer to those that are more accessible and also updated, and not only to the classical list of scholars to which we are accustomed.

The aim of this work was threefold. On the one hand, to offer a diachronic bibliographical selection of the most recent material. On the other, to reflect on the way of understanding the Melodist's work, as well as to provide a panoramic view of methodological trends that research on Romanos' *kontakia* is taking. We also deal with a subject that is not usually dealt with in the manuscript tradition of Romanos: the papyri – on which we also offer an up-to-date bibliography – and a series of codices that have never been taken into account in the edition of the Melodist and never been cited in research works. Finally, we tried to extract the percentages derived from the quantitative study of the formal and compositional elements of his hymnical corpus. These data undoubtedly provide useful information for the study of Romanos' *Cantica*.

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⁴ A specific bibliography on the life of Romanos the Melodist can be found in Prelipcean (2019).

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