

CHARLES H. COSGROVE

An Ancient
Christian Hymn
with Musical
Notation

*Studien und Texte zu
Antike und Christentum*

65

Mohr Siebeck

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An Ancient Christian Hymn with Musical Notation

Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1786:
Text and Commentary

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This study is a comprehensive examination of Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1786, a fragmentary musical score of a third-century Greek Christian hymn. The fragment is housed in the collection of Oxyrhynchus papyri at the Sackler Library, one of the Bodleian libraries of Oxford University. Previous studies of the fragment – some soon after its initial publication in 1922 and others scattered over the ensuing years – have been relatively short. A number of them have made lasting contributions to our understanding of the hymn. Others are of dubious value. Specialists in ancient Greek music have provided indispensable technical studies of the text and musical notation. Students of ancient Christian thought and liturgy have offered limited and sometimes misleading discussions of the music of the text. Some areas of interest have been largely neglected or overlooked. There have been few efforts to interpret the hymn text as a theological and liturgical document of the early church.¹ Almost no consideration has been given to the social setting of the hymn in late-third-century Oxyrhynchus. Apart from a debate about whether the hymn belongs to the Greek musical tradition, there has been no detailed musical analysis of the melody.²

The purpose of the present study is to consolidate the gains of past scholarship and to expand on them by providing a comprehensive examination of the hymn's text, music, and social setting. An opening chapter rehearses previous research on the hymn. A second chapter is devoted to establishing the text and musical notation of the hymn, giving an account of what is visible under high magnification at points where the papyrus has been worn or damaged. Chapter three interprets the text of the hymn in the context of early Christian literature. Chapter four examines the formal and rhetorical features of the hymn. Chapter five provides a detailed musical analysis, which is undergirded

¹ I hasten to add that classicists have observed important parallels in the language of the hymn to the later hymns of Synesius and to hymnic and poetic motifs in other Greek literature. These are an indispensable foundation for theological and liturgical study of the hymn. The only substantial discussions of the text as a theological document are valuable comments in Wolbergs (1971, 102–11) and somewhat flawed interpretations in Meier (2004, 47–60).

² Mountford (1929, 176) and Winnington-Ingram (1968 [1936], 44–45) proposed interpretations of its scale type. A number of interpreters have commented on the melody's use of melisma.

by an appendix on pitch centers in ancient Greek music. Chapter six situates the hymn in the social world of third-century Oxyrhynchus.

My interest in P.Oxy. 1786 began in 1999 when I first learned that scores survive of ancient Greek music and that they include a Christian hymn. My piqued curiosity led me to study the available scholarship on this hymn, and I soon discovered that one needs a sophisticated working knowledge of ancient Greek music if one wishes to understand its melody. Acquiring that knowledge, which is largely the province of classicists, proved to be no small task. I have received personal guidance from a number of specialists who patiently answered my inquiries – Martin West (Oxford University), John Landels (formerly of the University of Reading), Andrew Barker (University of Birmingham, UK), and Stefan Hagel (Austrian Academy of the Sciences). I owe a particular debt to Hagel, with whom I have had considerable correspondence over the last decade about many aspects of ancient Greek music. His guidance has been invaluable. He also devised the Greek musical notation fonts used in this book.

I also wish to thank The Egyptian Exploration Society for permission to publish an image of P.Oxy. 1786 (and the photographic details in chapter two). I am grateful as well to the Sackler Library of Oxford University and the staff of the papyrology rooms, who made it possible for me to study the fragment there. I wish to mention in particular Daniela Colomo, curator of the collection. Other scholars have also assisted me along the way. David Martinez of the University of Chicago gave me help with questions about papyrology. Peter Parsons, for many years head of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri Project, answered my queries about Arthur Hunt's working methods.

In writing this book, I have kept in mind that its readers are likely to include both specialists and nonspecialists and that some may not be adept in one or more of the disciplines on which it draws. Hence, I have translated almost every phrase of Greek and Latin and have explained all the technical concepts of ancient Greek music (and music generally) to which I refer.

Chicago, April 1, 2011

Charles H. Cosgrove

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Citations and Abbreviations

Abbreviations for names of ancient writings are those listed in *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Texts*, ed. Patrick H. Alexander et al. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999). All translations of ancient writings are the author's own unless otherwise indicated by the words, "ET by" (English translation by). The numbering of the hymns of Synesius follows the order in Gruber and Strohm (1991).

Abbreviations of series titles and other works are those listed in the *SBL Handbook*. Additional abbreviations are given below.

AAA	Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha
AKWG	Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen
ANCL	Ante-Nicene Christian Library
BKA	Bibliothek der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften
BKP	Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie
CCSA	Corpus Christianorum, Series apocryphorum
CCTC	Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries
CID	Corpus des Inscriptions de Delphes
CRLM	Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music
CUF	Collection des Universités de France
DAGM	Pöhlmann and West, <i>Documents of Ancient Greek Music</i>
EH	Europäische Hochschulschriften
ET	English translation
FPCRCDO	Fonti / Pontificia Commissione per la Redazione del Codice di Diritto Canonico Orientale
GG	Grammatici Graeci
GRM	Graeco-Roman Memoirs
LG	Lexicographie Graeci
LT	Lectio Teubneriana
MS	Mnemosyne Supplementum
OCM	Oxford Classical Monographs
PCHMTL	Publications of the Center for the History of Music Theory and Literature
PRM	Psychological Review Monographs
QSMAG	Quellen und Studien zur Musikgeschichte von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart
SAK	Studien zur Alten Kirchengeschichte
SGL	Scriptores Graeci et Latini
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
SWC	Sammlung Wissenschaftliche Commentare
WS	Wiener Studien
WS	Woodbridge Studies

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Upon its discovery, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1786 was greeted with interest by specialists in ancient Greek music, who have typically been classicists. A flurry of notices as well as substantial articles appeared immediately after its publication. Hunt, the hymn's original editor, assigned the fragment to the latter part of the third century on the grounds that its handwriting is not as late as the fourth century (*terminus a quo*) and that the grain account on the recto appears to date from the first half of the third century (*terminus ad quem*).¹ He did not supply a translation but characterized the sense of the piece as follows: "Creation at large is called upon to join in a chorus of praise to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the concluding passage is the usual ascription of power and glory to the 'only giver of all good gifts'."²

Hunt judged the meter of the hymn to be anapaestic with a few forgivable irregularities. He interpreted the musical notation in the light of what was then known of Greek music, attending in particular to recent work on the Berlin paean by Reinach. Hunt puzzled over the use of a colon (:) in the hymn as a musical symbol and tentatively concluded that certain regularly-spaced dots were thesis-points (to mark the beginning of the thesis in the arsis-thesis scheme of Greek verse). Later studies would clarify these matters.

Wilamowitz brought Hunt's publication to the attention of German scholarship and proposed that the hymn was an adaptation of a pagan prayer into which Christians inserted, against the poetic meter, a Trinitarian formula.³ Other scholars did not accept the suggestion that the hymnist reworked a borrowed poem, but Wilamowitz's observation that the hymn shares features with the hymnody of Mesomedes turned out to be an enduring insight. Another review of Hunt's publication came from Crönert, who noted parallels between the language of P.Oxy. 1786 and the hymns of Synesius (c. 370–c. 413), a Christian theologian and poet.⁴ Further contributions to reconstructing the text and placing it in the context of Greek literature and hymnody followed in examinations of the hymn by Del Grande and Terzaghi.⁵ Thanks to these

¹ Hunt and Jones (1922).

² Hunt and Jones (1922, 22).

³ Wilamowitz-Möllendorff (1922, 317).

⁴ Crönert (1922, 398).

⁵ Del Grande (1923); Terzaghi (1963 [1925]).

early efforts, only reinforced by subsequent investigations, it is now apparent that the words partially preserved in line 2 express a widespread motif of cosmic stillness before an offering to a deity: *σιγάτω, μηδ' ἄστρα φασφόρα ... ποταμῶν ῥοθίων πᾶσαι* ("Let [them] be silent. Let the luminous stars not [...] of all surging rivers").

In 1922, Abert, a musicologist with training in classical philology, reviewed certain technical aspects of the hymn, commented on the musical-aesthetic quality of the song, and considered its significance for the history of church music.⁶ Abert observed that scholarship in his day was becoming increasingly accustomed to thinking of ancient Jewish Temple music and its psalms as the chief source of early Christian music. The emerging view was that Greek musical influences appeared only later, when Christianity expanded into more culturally-refined circles. Abert held up P.Oxy. 1786 as counter-evidence. He then gave a sketch of Christian hymnody in Egyptian Christianity in the first four centuries, suggesting that Greek forms of Christian music may have flourished in that part of the world from an early date. In a subsequent essay,⁷ Abert again joined the debate about whether ancient Christian music was Jewish *or* Greek, calling this a false opposition and insisting that in varying degrees and ways ancient Christian music was both Jewish and Greek. He emphasized once more that the music of P.Oxy. 1786 is thoroughly Greek but now characterized it as Greek music stirred by a new spirit ("das Wehen eines neuen Geistes"⁸). Abert claimed to hear a curious disquiet or agitation ("eine seltsame Unruhe"⁹) not found, he judged, in the other extant Greek musical documents. It is not altogether clear what Abert meant by this, but it sounds like an insinuation that P.Oxy. 1786 represents a special *Christian* kind of Greek music that is reaching for something more than what the pagan melodies of the other ancient scores offer.

Another 1922 essay on P.Oxy. 1786 came from the pen of Reinach, the first specialist in ancient Greek music to subject the hymn to close analysis.¹⁰ Reinach criticized musicologists who rejected the possibility of a Hellenistic origin of church music and who posited instead a synagogue origin of ancient Christian music. The claim that the church's lost melodies developed from synagogue chants unknown to us amounted, Reinach remarked, to the old fallacy of explaining the obscure by the more obscure.¹¹ Like Abert, Reinach was contending with an early-twentieth century shift in scholarship away from the assumption that Christian music grew out of the Greek tradition

⁶ Abert (1921/22).

⁷ Abert (1926).

⁸ Abert (1926, 287).

⁹ Abert (1926, 287).

¹⁰ Reinach (1922).

¹¹ Reinach (1922, 9).

to the assumption (soon to become the dominant twentieth-century view) that the Jewish musical tradition – and *not* Greek music – was the source of the church's music. According to this thesis, an unbroken musical tradition extends from synagogue chant to the liturgical chant of the Eastern and Western churches. Confident in this assumption, scholars engaged in hypothetical reconstructions of early Christian music based on the much later evidence of Jewish and Christian chant.

Reinach took P.Oxy. 1786 as an instance of ancient Greek music. He found its poetry largely unoriginal but not completely lacking in charm. He affirmed Hunt's judgment that the meter is thoroughly anapaestic, noting that the anapaestic meter was one of the most popular in the imperial period. Observing certain metrical irregularities, he also agreed with Hunt that a poet is permitted a few cola that do not quite fit the metrical scheme. Nevertheless, in an important insight, Reinach pointed out that the irregularities in the verbal metrical structure are brought into the general scheme by the music.¹² This observation would be corroborated and further refined by West. Reinach also recognized that the "points" marked the arsis ("upbeat"),¹³ not the thesis as Hunt had thought; and he noted that if one follows an anapaestic interpretation of the meter, it appears that the arsis pointing gets off track beginning with the word *παῖσαι* in line 4. Reinach put this down to a copyist's error.¹⁴

Reinach proposed his own readings of the text and notation of the hymn and presented two transcriptions, one a strict documentary version and the other a free modernizing arrangement. For the latter he supplied missing notes and words, emended the notation where he thought it suspect, and provided a piano accompaniment prepared by a conservatory-trained musician (a certain "M^{lle} G. R.").¹⁵

Not long after Reinach's contribution, Ursprung, a specialist in church music, offered comments on P.Oxy. 1786 in an article published in 1923¹⁶ and a second in 1926.¹⁷ Ursprung suggested that the hymn was probably sung by a solo singer and had its place at the "agape" meal or a similar setting.¹⁸

¹² Reinach (1922, 14–16).

¹³ The term arsis (*ἄρσις*) originally referred to the lifting of the foot in dance. The thesis (*θέσις*) was the lowering of the foot. At some point "arsis" and "thesis" became rhythmical terms for analyzing Greek verse. For convenience, one can call them "upbeat" and "downbeat."

¹⁴ Reinach (1922, 21–23).

¹⁵ Reinach's two versions are reproduced side by side in Stäblein (1955, 1053–56) with conjectured bracketed notes from the second placed not in the second but in the first at the very beginning, with the notation of the second sometimes left out where it is identical with the first and sometimes included where identical, and without the piano accompaniment of the second. All of this makes a confusing impression, especially since Stäblein did not explain the different aims of the two versions.

¹⁶ Ursprung (1923, 105–32).

¹⁷ Ursprung (1926, 387–419).

¹⁸ Ursprung (1923, 125–26).

The composer, he surmised, likely hailed from Alexandria and belonged to the circles of Clement and Origin.¹⁹ Ursprung found the hymn to be Greek in character but with some novel elements. Noting that the melody piles up sequences of falling patterns, he concluded that the hymn relies heavily on stereotypical Greek solmization examples, which make it look almost like a school exercise.²⁰ He also contended that the hymn's melisms²¹ far exceed what then-known documents of Greek music display and that its uses of "amen" sound like anticipations of Gregorian "Amen-Jubilations."²² Moreover, the melismatic style is an "Oriental" influence that was already making itself felt to a lesser degree elsewhere in Roman-era Greek music, as evidenced by the song of Seikilos and the Berlin paean.²³ In these respects, Ursprung concluded, the hymn appears to anticipate later church song. Finally, the hymn does not adhere faithfully to its metrical scheme and fails to keep its melody anchored to the verbal accents of its text. These departures from the conventions of Greek composition are particularly evident, Ursprung suggested, in certain "ecstatic" moments in the hymn, specifically with the mention of the Holy Spirit and in the amen sequences.²⁴ All of this, he thought, suggested a very personal expression of praise.

Some of Ursprung's judgments require substantial modification; others do not stand up at all. With many more documents for comparison, we can now see that the melismatic style of P.Oxy. 1786 is not more pronounced than in other Greek scores from the same period. In fact, the tendency toward greater melismatic composition was a trend in Greek music of imperial times.²⁵ A diminishing correspondence between melody and word accents is also a feature of third-century Greek music.²⁶ As for the metrical problems, they stem from the inclusion of traditional Christian formulas and not from the hymnist's inability to produce lines that scan properly. Here it is important to recall Reinach's observation that the melody helps to carry the meter at those points where traditional language cannot be accommodated to the anapaestic scheme.²⁷

¹⁹ Ursprung (1923, 132).

²⁰ Ursprung (1923, 112). Ursprung found these solmization patterns in Vivell (1911, 44). Vivell, however, referred not to solmization patterns but to note-groups and tone-groups, taking his examples from the then-current collection of ancient Greek musical documents by Jan.

²¹ Melisma is the setting of a single syllable to more than one note. An instance of this is a melism.

²² Ursprung (1923, 112).

²³ Ursprung (1923, 112–13).

²⁴ Ursprung (1923, 113).

²⁵ See West (1992b, 202–4).

²⁶ See chapter five; also Cosgrove and Meyer (2006).

²⁷ West has also made this point very forcefully (West [1992a, 48]).

Ursprung granted that P.Oxy. 1786 was shaped by Greek song, but he also stressed its departures from Greek music, which he associated with a spiritually bankrupt pagan world. In his view, the Christian religion arrived at just the right moment to liberate music by offering a new form – ecstatic music from the heart, inspired by the Spirit, the kind of song Paul recommends in 1 Cor 14:15 and Eph 5:18–19 (Col 3:16).²⁸ Ursprung was convinced that the melody of P.Oxy. 1786 surpasses in beauty all the other known Greek songs from antiquity.²⁹ Having worked with this hymn for some time, I agree that it presents a lovely melody. But only a highly prejudiced Christian musical imagination could hear in this hymn the *redemption* of pagan melody!

Wagner, a specialist in ancient Greek music, offered a comprehensive analysis of P.Oxy. 1786 in a 1924 article.³⁰ He went over much of the same terrain as Reinach, including the establishment of the vocal text and musical notation (giving his own readings after correspondence with Hunt), the influence of the Greek tonal accent on the melody, the arsis pointing, the meter of the hymn, parallels in other Greek literature to the content of the hymn, the question of the settings in which the hymn might have been sung, the mode of performance, and the musical-aesthetic qualities of the hymn. Wagner described various felicities of musical and textual construction in P.Oxy. 1786 and believed he could hear in the hymn the whole of ancient Christian faith singing down through the centuries.³¹ But he judged that the piece poses technical challenges to the singer (because of the melisms) and therefore concluded that it was not a song meant for the ordinary congregation.³² Others, having made some effort at performing the hymn, would repeat this claim about its difficulty. In my experience, however, untrained singers do not find the hymn technically difficult to sing. The melody has a compass of only an octave and none of the intervals (all diatonic) or rhythms are hard to hear or produce vocally.

Wagner found a combination of Greek and “Oriental” (Jewish, Syrian, etc.) styles in the hymn and noted points of similarity – melodic but not rhythmic – with later church melodies, explaining that these are not direct connections but common features arising from the laws of modal agreement.³³ Like Abert, he assessed the significance of the hymn for church music, stressing that it shows a close connection between ancient Christian music and the music of Greek antiquity. One feature of Wagner’s analysis that caught

²⁸ Ursprung (1923, 117–20).

²⁹ Ursprung (1923, 114).

³⁰ Wagner (1924, 201–22).

³¹ Wagner (1924, 211).

³² Wagner (1924, 212). On this point Wagner was echoing Abert, who also judged that the melody of P.Oxy. 1786 is an advanced form of hymnody not meant for the “poor in spirit” (Abert [1921/22, 529]).

³³ Wagner (1924, 215n20).

special notice from other scholars was his claim that the central part of the fragment, from *σγάτω* to *πνεῦμα*, is in dactyls. His metrical analysis has not proven persuasive.³⁴

A final word from 1920s scholarship on P.Oxy. 1786 came in the form of a few very brief remarks by Mountford in a survey of ancient Greek music. Like Abert and Wagner, Mountford saw the hymn as proof that the church produced hymns in the Greek musical tradition, “making use of a type of music to which their proselytes were accustomed.”³⁵ He went so far as to suggest that “if the early Christians at first modeled their music on Jewish Psalmody, they had abandoned it even before the more wealthy classes joined the new religion in considerable numbers.”³⁶ This assertion hardly stands up today against all the evidence that psalmody flourished in the fourth century and was probably popular in the third century as well,³⁷ whether or not it was part of Christian music from the beginning.

Wellesz and Holleman

A major challenge to the original general consensus that P.Oxy. 1786 is a specimen of ancient Greek music came from Wellesz, an influential scholar in the field of Byzantine music. In a 1945 article, Wellesz gave an idiosyncratic interpretation of the rhythmical notation and claimed that the hymn was *not* a piece of Greek music at all but belonged rather to an “Oriental” musical tradition common to Jews and Syrians.³⁸ He suggested that the composer of the hymn probably used ancient melodic formulas that go back to the most primitive church, which, Wellesz maintained, inherited its musical tradition from Jewish psalmody.³⁹ He found striking melodic similarities between P.Oxy. 1786 and Byzantine hymnody, as well as Gregorian chant.⁴⁰ He even suggested that the text might be a Greek translation of a Jewish or Syrian hymn.⁴¹ Not all church-music historians were persuaded by Wellesz’s interpretation,⁴² but his view has

³⁴ There is general agreement that the hymn is in anapaests throughout. See Terzaghi (1963, 670–71); Pighi (1941, 199–208); Münscher (1952); Dihle (1954, 189–90); Pöhlmann (1970, 108); West (1992a, 47–48); Pöhlmann and West (2001, 192).

³⁵ Mountford (1929, 178).

³⁶ Mountford (1929, 178).

³⁷ See McKinnon (1987, 7–11).

³⁸ Wellesz (1945); idem (1961, 152–56).

³⁹ Wellesz (1945, 45); cf. idem (1961, 156).

⁴⁰ Wellesz (1945, 44).

⁴¹ Wellesz (1961, 155–56).

⁴² Jammers (1962, 34–41) challenged Wellesz’s interpretation of the hymn, arguing (on the basis of the earlier studies by Hunt and Wagner) that, musically and metrically, the hymn fit generally (although not fully) with what was then known of ancient Greek music.

continued to exert influence,⁴³ despite being rejected by specialists in ancient Greek music, including Winnington-Ingram, Pöhlmann, and West.⁴⁴

Wellesz contended that the hymn shows metrical irregularities, if treated as Greek music, but makes perfect sense if regarded as an example of free rhythm characteristic of the “Oriental” style. In support of this argument he gave a reading of the rhythmic notation of the hymn that no specialist in Greek music has accepted. Moreover, both previous and subsequent specialists in Greek poetry have shown that the composer took care to construct the hymn in quantitative Greek meter (anapaests throughout).⁴⁵ Wellesz also pointed to the hymn’s rich flow of melody in its melisms, which he regarded as uncharacteristic of Greek music but typical of the Oriental style. Although he was aware that the Berlin paean (P.Ber. 6870) shows a similar melismatic style, he discounted this evidence. Today we possess many more Greek musical documents from the imperial period, which show increasing use of melisma as a Roman-era trend. Wellesz also discovered a use of repeated melodic formulas linked by intervening melodic passages of varying length. This reminded him of the use of melodic formulas in Byzantine and Gregorian chant. This observation, too, easily gives a misleading impression. It is possible that the hymn uses formulas, which would not be surprising or necessarily un-Greek.⁴⁶ Moreover, exact and varied repetition of patterns separated by intervening material is also typical of other Greek musical documents.

The next important study of the hymn appeared in 1971. In an anthology of gnostic and early Christian psalms and hymns, Wolbergs presented a critical text of the lyrics and provided the most comprehensive discussion to that time of parallels in other ancient liturgical texts and literature (both pagan and Christian).⁴⁷ This examination led him to propose that the hymn was intended for use in the eucharistic service. As for the musical notation, Wolbergs

⁴³ The continuing influence of Wellesz can be seen in Crocker’s treatment of P.Oxy. 1786 in what is otherwise an excellent study of Gregorian chant. Although Crocker observed “a few indications of verbal or musical rhythm,” he made no specific mention of the rhythmic signs in the musical notation and in his transcription set up the hymn like a chant, ignoring the rhythmic notation (Crocker [2000, 71–72]). The influence of Wellesz also dominates other recent studies of the hymn: Tripp and Wheeler (1997); idem (1989); and Meier (2004, 41–67). Tripp and Wheeler overlooked West’s work and relied heavily on Wellesz (1945) and Leclercq (1937). Meier was apparently also unaware of West’s trenchant critique of Wellesz and concluded that the hymn shows close affinities with Gregorian chant, as opposed to ancient Greek music. He identified these Gregorian affinities as the hymn’s “expressive” melodic style (melisms, rhythmic “carelessness,” and intervallic leaps), use of a diatonic scale, and construction with internally-related phrases and cadences (Meier [2004, 62–63]). This is almost pure Wellesz, and all of it is misleading as an argument that the hymn’s melodic character is more proto-Gregorian than Greek.

⁴⁴ The following critique of Wellesz reflects the work of Winnington-Ingram and West, whose studies of the hymn are presented in greater detail below.

⁴⁵ See the authors listed in n. 34 above.

⁴⁶ See West (1992b, 194).

⁴⁷ Wolbergs (1971, 13–14, 100–111).

deferred to Wellesz, observing that, although early studies placed the hymn in the Greek tradition, Wellesz had shown a more immediate influence from the musical culture to which Hebrew chant belongs, a musical tradition adopted by the church and leading directly to Byzantine and Gregorian chant.⁴⁸

A year after Wolbergs' study, Holleman restated and amplified Wellesz's position on the hymn.⁴⁹ According to Holleman, the church fathers rejected Greek music, the reason being that Greek music was "beat" music. At least that was the case by Hellenistic and Roman times, Holleman explained, when the rhythm of Greek music had developed from a quantitatively-based meter to a stress-based meter with dominant beats being accented by rhythm instruments such as castanets and clappers. "It is precisely this Hellenistic element," he said, "the 'beat'-character of music all over the Roman Empire, that for centuries long was combated by ecclesiastical authorities East and West as endangering liturgical music and poisoning the Christian mind."⁵⁰ By contrast, he argued, the rhythm of early Christian music, out of which Gregorian chant developed, was neither stress-based nor quantitative. It was unstressed and free of rhythm because note values tended to be equal.⁵¹

Siding with Wellesz, Holleman also claimed an "Oriental" origin for P.Oxy. 1786 and cited in support a short review of Wellesz's 1945 article. The review was by Winnington-Ingram, a leading specialist in ancient Greek music.⁵² Winnington-Ingram had expressed a degree of openness to Wellesz's theory in a 1954 article for *Grove's Dictionary*;⁵³ but he had changed his mind by the time of his subsequent review, in which he allowed that Wellesz "may be correct" but also insisted that the song "should be interpreted in the light of our other Greek evidence" and chided Wellesz for not taking seriously that the musical notation is Greek.⁵⁴ Despite the tenor of Winnington-Ingram's review, Holleman construed it as support for the possibility of a non-Greek, Syrian origin for the hymn. In a more pointed footnote in another study, Winnington-Ingram spoke more plainly:

When [Wellesz] comes to transcribing the hymn, he interprets the rhythmical notation entirely without reference to the evidence of the other fragments of Greek music. Yet this is the relevant evidence. The words are Greek, the metre is Greek, the melodic notation is Greek; so is the rhythmical notation, and it is used consistently with anapaestic interpretation of the metre.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Wolbergs (1971, 101).

⁴⁹ Holleman (1972, 1–17).

⁵⁰ Holleman (1972, 9).

⁵¹ Holleman (1972, 13–17).

⁵² Winnington-Ingram (1958, 10).

⁵³ Winnington-Ingram commented on P.Oxy. 1786 that "its affinities are perhaps with Asiatic rather than with Greek music" (Winnington-Ingram [1954, 780]).

⁵⁴ Winnington-Ingram (1958, 10).

⁵⁵ Winnington-Ingram (1955, 80–81n2).

Evidently, Holleman did not know this footnote and probably would not have been deterred by it because he was convinced that he had an ally in Pöhlmann, another specialist in Greek music.

Holleman adduced comments from a 1960 study in which Pöhlmann interpreted the metrical irregularities, the melismatic tendencies, and an absence of correspondence between melody and word accent in P.Oxy. 1786 as influences of Hebrew religious music on an author who used Greek models but had no ear for Greek.⁵⁶ A decade later, however, when a more seasoned Pöhlmann brought out his critical edition of Greek musical documents (a 1970 publication apparently unknown to Holleman), Pöhlmann was of a different mind. Although he repeated his view that the composer did not possess a sure-footed sense for quantitative meter or an ear for the Greek tonal accent, he no longer claimed these as evidence of un-Greek influences – probably because he now recognized them as tendencies of late Greek music.⁵⁷ Moreover, Pöhlmann observed that Winnington-Ingram had offered a secure metrical-rhythmic analysis of the hymn and had shown, against Wellesz, that the piece fits closely with the other Greek musical documents.⁵⁸

Like Wellesz, Holleman disregarded the rhythmic notation. His transcription stripped the hymn of rhythm, making almost all note values equal in duration and dispensing with the bar lines that other transcribers of Greek music use to represent metrical-rhythmical regularity. Faced with the fact of the text's use of Greek musical notation, he argued that the hymn is "a demonstration of the inadequacy, and at least as far as rhythmical signs, of the fundamental error of using the existing Greek notation for Christian music."⁵⁹

Holleman was not a specialist in ancient Greek music and seems to have had only a passing knowledge of it. What struck him as obvious is hardly evident when one gives the rhythmic notation its due and makes a close comparison of P.Oxy. 1786 with other ancient Greek musical documents of the imperial period. When that is done, it is hard to see how rhythmic and melodic signs that yield a perfectly good ancient Greek melody, reflective of other Greek music of the period, demonstrate that Christian song was too un-Greek to be expressed in Greek musical notation.

Interpretation Since Holleman

In the nearly forty years since Holleman's article, P.Oxy. 1786 has been largely neglected by church historians and specialists in ancient Christian music,

⁵⁶ Pöhlmann (1960, 47).

⁵⁷ Pöhlmann (1970, 108).

⁵⁸ Pöhlmann (1970, 109).

⁵⁹ Holleman (1972, 11).

receiving at most a short paragraph or two here and there. Quasten dealt briefly with the artifact in his erudite treatment of music in Christian and pagan antiquity. In a footnote to his comments on P.Oxy. 1786 in the second German edition of that work (1973), Quasten reported on the question whether the hymn is Greek or Jewish/Syrian, adducing a list of opinions that included those of Wellesz and Holleman along with Holleman's references to Winnington-Ingram and Pöhlmann. Although Quasten did not take a stand on the issue, his list left the impression that scholarship was leaning toward Wellesz.⁶⁰ As we have seen, by the early 1970s scholarship was divided in a peculiar fashion, with specialists in ancient Greek music regarding P.Oxy. 1786 as a piece of Greek music and historians of early Christian music holding that it is not Greek but Jewish/Syrian.

Following the original editor of P.Oxy. 1786, Quasten interpreted the text of the hymn as expressing a frequent theme of the church fathers, namely, that all creation should praise God with hymns. He was apparently unaware of the opinion, based on literary parallels and a different reconstruction of the text and syntax of lines 2 and 3, that the hymn uses a widely-attested motif of Greek literature and hymnody in calling for various cosmic elements to be *still* before an offering or divine epiphany.⁶¹ Literary and syntactical considerations now make it almost certain that the hymn employs this cosmic stillness motif,⁶² which strengthens the impression that we have a piece of Greek Christian music (and a precursor of the hymns of Synesius, some of which display the same motif⁶³).

The first edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980) included an article on the music of the Christian church by Hannick, who briefly surveyed scholarship on P.Oxy. 1786, finishing with Holleman's essay.⁶⁴ Hannick termed the hymn an "isolated attempt to record a melody" and concluded that even if Holleman's theory about the hymn is "exaggerated," nevertheless, "it must be admitted that this fragment does not prove that Christians in 3rd-century Egypt used Greek notation, nor [*sic*] that the melody of this hymn was typical of early Christian music."⁶⁵ Hannick's characterization of the document as an "isolated attempt to record a melody" is an unfortunate formulation. The word "attempt" echoes Holleman's misguided

⁶⁰ Quasten (1983 [1973], 105n59b).

⁶¹ Pöhlmann (1970, 107); Wolbergs (1971, 13–14, 106–8); Del Grande (1923, 173–9); Terzaghi (1963, 673–74); Pighi (1941, 214–15).

⁶² On the literary parallels, see West (1992a, 48–50). A syntactical consideration pointed out by Wolbergs (1971, 106) is that *μηδὲ* is not postpositive and therefore should be construed not with *σγᾶτω* ("Let it/them be silent") but with what follows (where stars and rivers are mentioned).

⁶³ Synesius, *Hymn*. 1.72–85; 2.26–43.

⁶⁴ Hannick (1980, 367–68).

⁶⁵ Hannick (1980, 368).

notion of a failed experiment, and “isolated” suggests the dubious reasoning that if only one fragment of notated Christian music has been found, only one such score ever existed. We will consider this question in detail in chapter six.

McKinnon wrote the article on music in the early church for the second edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. In a few remarks about P.Oxy. 1786, he recognized the hymn as a piece of Greek music but insisted that no implications could be drawn from it for our knowledge of ancient Christian music generally or even music in Greek Egyptian Christianity.⁶⁶ This judgment left the impression that the hymn was likely as not an isolated instance of a Christian hymn in a Greek musical style, as Hannick had suggested.

The most important treatment of the hymn after Holleman was a 1992 study by West, a specialist in ancient Greek music who in the same year published a superb history of ancient Greek music and went on to become Pöhlmann’s co-editor for a revised critical edition of the ancient Greek musical documents.⁶⁷ If Winnington-Ingram had been tactfully skeptical about Wellesz’s interpretation, West was direct and emphatic. He showed how the composer accommodated metrically-difficult Christian formulas in two ways.⁶⁸ First, at some points the hymnist let the music carry the meter (an observation Reinach had also made). At other points the hymnist shaped the traditional formulae to fit the meter. West also presented an array of Greek parallels to the hymn’s description of cosmic silence to show that the motif has “impeccably Hellenistic credentials.”⁶⁹ As for the music of the hymn, West corrected a number of Wellesz’s factual misstatements and demonstrated how neatly P.Oxy. 1786 fits into the Greek music of its time and place. Having made the case that every feature of the fragment can be illustrated from the extant scores of second- and third-century Roman Egypt, West concluded that “musically speaking the hymn stands squarely in the Greek tradition.”⁷⁰

The Scope of the Present Study

Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1786 is the only bit of ancient Christian music yet to come to light, preceding in time the earliest extant manuscripts of Gregorian chant that contain musical notation (neumes) by six centuries.⁷¹ Hence, it

⁶⁶ McKinnon (2001, 805).

⁶⁷ West (1992b); Pöhlmann and West (2001).

⁶⁸ West (1992a, 47–54).

⁶⁹ West (1992a, 49).

⁷⁰ West (1992a, 54). The tendency of a past generation of early-church historians to assume that early-Christian music grew out of Jewish music and not Greek music has recently been addressed by Porter, who has also taken note of West’s work on P.Oxy. 1786 (Porter [2000]).

⁷¹ See, for example, Jeffrey (1982).

warrants a comprehensive treatment that builds on the scholarship of specialists in ancient Greek music and also considers the hymn as an important artifact of church history. Because P.Oxy. 1786 is a short fragment and derives from the end of the history of ancient Greek music as documented by surviving scores, it has not been a principal focus of students of ancient Greek music, who have naturally been more interested in reconstructing what can be known of music in the Classical era (the music of the great dramatists, the music that caused debate in Greek philosophy, the music for which the philosophers such as Aristoxenus sought to provide general theories, and so forth), in the Hellenistic era as represented by two substantial multi-sectioned scores from a cultic ceremony at Athens in 127/128 B.C.E. (the Delphic paeans), and in the Roman era as represented by the composer Mesomedes. Nevertheless, specialists in ancient Greek music have made the most important contributions to understanding the hymn. As for historians of ancient Christian liturgy and music, whose principal scholarly interests naturally include an artifact such as P.Oxy. 1786, they have treated the hymn only occasionally and often with an insufficient grasp of ancient Greek music. The challenges of mastering the technical scholarship on the subject have no doubt deterred some from exploring the hymn for themselves.

As a specialist in ancient Christianity, a musician, and one who has devoted nearly a decade to gaining a serious acquaintance with the scholarship on ancient Greek music, including familiarity with the surviving scores, I aim to provide a comprehensive examination of P.Oxy. 1786 as an expression of ancient music and early Christian faith. Hence, the present work engages the overlapping interests of classical philologists and specialists in ancient Greek music, who wish to understand the hymn as an example of Greek music from the late Roman era. It also addresses the interests of church historians, for whom the hymn provides an example of early Christian devotional piety. The study speaks to students of church music history as well, for whom the hymn presents the most ancient surviving instance of a notated Christian melody. One hopes that in further discoveries, perhaps even in the examination and publication of yet unedited papyri from past discoveries, another such hymn will come to light. Fragments of ancient Greek musical scores do continue to appear.⁷² But for now, P.Oxy. 1786 is our only example of pre-Gregorian Christian music. For that reason alone it deserves a comprehensive treatment.

⁷² Since the publication in 2001 of Pöhlmann and West's *Documents of Ancient Greek Music* (*DAGM*), which included quite a number of fragments of Greek music not known to Pöhlmann when he brought out his edition of the scores thirty years earlier (Pöhlmann [1970]), two other bits of ancient Greek music have been published: P.Louvre E 10534 (Bélis [2004]) and P.Oxy. 4710 (Yuan [2005]).