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The Minóre Dhrómos [Popular Mode] in the Songs of Vasílis Tsitsánis

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and many thanks for attending our conference. My paper deals with the Greek popular modes, the so-called dhrómi. Δρόμος [dhrómos] in Greek means road or street. The laikós dhrómos [that is, popular mode] is, more or less, a communication code used by Greek musicians. This code is passed on by oral tradition. It is based however on modal theoretical systems, and more specifically on the system of the Ottoman makams.

Evidence suggests that there is a possibility that many musicians of the bouzouki-based rembétiko school in Piraeus thought that they were actually playing the original makams, whereas the evidence (that is, the actual recordings) points to the fact that they were creating a different version of them. The situation became clearer when chordal harmony was introduced to the style. During the years of the music of the cafés and the first years of the rembétiko period (that is, around the 1930s), the way that Greek musicians used the makams was similar to the way in which the makams were used in the Ottoman repertoire. Obviously, the turning point should be sought somewhere around this moment, when the refugees were performing their music which was very close to the ‘authentic’ makam style (mainly using fretless instruments), while the Greeks at Piraeus were trying to learn and perform it within their context (that is, ethos, aesthetics and themes of the lyrics). The moment that the bouzouki – a fretted instrument – became the mainland Greeks’ basic and leading instrument, is perhaps the moment when the change of style took effect.

The most prominent of the theoretical problems that exist today is the erroneous association drawn between the laikó dhromi and the Turkish makams. As mentioned earlier, a crucial difference is that, contrary to the instruments of Greek laikó music, Turkish music mostly uses instruments without frets or with movable

frets. We are, therefore, dealing with a comparison that is false from the very beginning, since we are discussing musical systems with two very different theoretical backgrounds, the use of micro-tones on the one hand and, on the other, tones and semi-tones only. Due to the aforementioned problem regarding the erroneous tendency to draw parallels between the dhrómi and the makams, it cannot be stated for example, that song A is making use of the Ousák dhrómos for, despite the fact that Greek musicians accept, use and (above all) understand each other when using this terminology, it is impossible for the Greek Ousák to be the same as the Ottoman Uşşák, because of the micro-tones.

Moreover, the strangest part of this issue is that although Greeks kept the makam names, the names of many dhrómi are mistakenly used, for they do not correspond to the original makams (for example, dhrómos Ousák does not correspond to makam Uşşák). This problematic use of names has created a bizarre situation where Greek musicians communicate on the music stands by actually using incorrect names to refer to the dhrómi.

Another confusing issue is the fact that Greek laikó musicians think of the dhrómi as being scales of eight notes, that is, octachords. They teach them in this way and they also communicate on the music stands in this way. A glance at the few books published by bouzouki players verifies this interesting point. All the dhrómi are presented as being scales. However, the main element of the makam system is that it emphasizes the utilization of the tetrachord (that is, four notes) and the pentachord rather than the octachord. This does not mean, of course, that makam theory does not include and use the octachord. The importance of the tetrachord and pentachord is true for Byzantine music as well.

Although significant differences between the two systems exist, they still have one thing in common. This is the general concept under which both systems work. The few attempts by scholars to write on the topic have clashed with the oral tradition of the musicians, and instead of solving the problem, have created two ‘camps’, one of which follows the rules of the music stand, and the other the proposals of the scholars. Therefore, well-organized and in-depth research is urgently needed in order to at least prevent the continuation of this problem.

The Minóre dhrómos

Turning now to the so-called by Greek musicians dhrómos Minóre; it is crucial to clarify the use of the term within laikó music. Greek laikó musicians separate the Minóre dhrómos into two main categories, based on whether it utilizes a chromatically raised seventh degree or not. Thus, they usually refer to *φυσική μινόρε* [fisikí minóre = natural minor] as the one that has a natural seventh degree and *αρμονική μινόρε* [armonikí minóre = harmonic minor] as the one that has a chromatically raised seventh degree. There are, however, some problematic issues regarding this nomenclature, for unavoidably, these modes did not derive from the Western classical music tradition, but from the makams. On the other hand, there are songs, especially within Tsitsánis's repertoire, whose use of Minóre Armonikó seems clearly closer to Western tradition, rather than to Eastern.

It is very rare to find a song based totally on one of the two Minóres, without utilizing elements from the other. For instance, it is very common for laikó songs to use the upper tetrachord as it is used in the Minóre Natural, that is, A // B flat // C // D' notes, but, on the other hand, use a C sharp note as the leading tone in the lower pentachord in the cadences. The following Figure 1 shows the two main Minóre variations (staff one and two). Staff three shows dhrómos Niavénd which is similar to dhrómos Minóre Armonikó having though its fourth degree raised. The last staff of the figure shows the most common combination of the two Minóres.

Dhrómos Mínóre Natural

Dhrómos Mínóre Armonikó

Dhrómos Niavénd

A very common-popular combination

Figure 1: Mínóre Natural, Mínóre Armonikó, Niavénd and a popular combination

The melodic movement is not only responsible for determining the type of Mínóre used. The harmony is also a serious factor that can confuse things. For instance, there may be a melody set only in the lower pentachord, that is, D to A, which is identical for both Mínóres. Therefore, one cannot suggest that this particular melody belongs in the sphere of Armonikó, nor of Natural. Thus, a fifth major chord could play the determining role in this case, for it includes a seventh raised note and thus, this particular melody would incline towards that of the Armonikó.

The next figures show to which Ottoman makams these dhrómi correspond, in order to show the extent of this confusing situation. Figure 2 represents dhrómos Mínóre Armonikó and its correspondent, makam Nihâvend.

Dhrómos Minóre Armonikó

Leading note

I

D Minóre 5-chord

G Nikríz 5-chord

D Minóre 4-chord

A Hitzáz 4-chord

Corresponds to

Makam Nihâvend

I

Nihâvend 5-chord

G Hicâz 4-chord

Figure 2: Dhrómos Minóre Armonikó and makam Nihâvend

On the other hand, dhrómos Niavénd (the name obviously taken from makam Nihâvend) corresponds to makam Neveser (Figure 3).

Dhrómos Niavénd

Leading note

I

F Houzám 5-chord

D Nikríz 5-chord

A Hitzáz 4-chord

Makam Neveser

I

Nikríz 5-chord

G Hicâz 4-chord

Figure 3: Dhrómos Niavénd and makam Neveser

As a matter of fact, many songs based on dhrómos Minóre Armonikó make use of the raised fourth degree (in our case G sharp). This is a very common idiomatic movement of the fourth and thus, many times, dhrómi Minóre Armonikó and Niavénd are considered to be one single dhrómos.

However, there are songs that are wholly based on dhrómos Niavénd, that is, they have the fourth raised within the entire song, and this is the basic reason for the separation of these two dhrómi.

Let us see an example of a case where all these three dhrómi (Minóre Natural, Armonikó and Niavénd) co-exist in the same song (I should clarify that all the examples are songs of Tsitsanis): the song's title is *Γειτόνισσα*¹ [ghitónisa = neighbour]: the piece is in B tonality. The moment is very important when the intro comes to end and changes from Armonikó to Natural Minóre by falling to the A natural note [sound example].

The problems regarding terminology do not end here, for most of the early rembétiko songs that utilize what would be called Minóre Natural, do so clearly in a way that makam Hüseyinî does. Furthermore, in cases where the co-existence of many dhrómi or makams that are very similar is noted, even more confusion arises. The reason is simple, yet very serious: once Greek musicians tried to put elements from the makam system into their dhrómi, they did so in a way that kept the idioms and the basic characteristics of the makams, such as the dominant notes and the gravitations. They could not succeed, though, in reproducing the intervals, for their main instrument was the fretted bouzouki. Therefore, if we also take into consideration the lack of basic theoretical background on the part of the Greek musicians involved, a song may utilize the gravitations and the dominant notes of Hüseyinî makam, but, nevertheless, is a clear Minóre Natural scale (at least theoretically, based on Greek laikó theory). Since they were unaware of how to separate the most of the times numerous versions of the makams, they chose the easiest way to merely divide all the minors (or, more correctly, everything that looked like a minor scale) into two: natural and harmonic. Figure 4 shows three makams which are similar with regard to their intervals and whose characteristics are found within rembétiko and laikó musical styles.

¹ Parlophone GO 2640 - B. 21897, recorded in late 1936.

Makam Nihâvend

Makam Hüseyinî

Makam Bûselik

Figure 4: Makams Nihâvend, Hüseyinî and Bûselik

Continuing with some special characteristics, many of which concern both Minóres, worth mentioning is the ending phrase of the introduction of the song *Ti thélis apó ména*² [ti thélis apó ména = what do you want from me]. This is a classical rembétiko/laikó shape, found in numerous songs.

His Master's Voice OGA 761 - AO 2484
 Hasápiko
 D Minóre Armonikó
 Time: 00.28

♩ = c. 60

Figure 5: *Ti thélis apó ména* transcription (Tsitsánis)

Generally, the use of triplets is very common, especially in hasápiko songs.

² HMV OGA 761 - AO 2484, recorded in 1938.

This particular note sequence, put in triplets, is one of the most common cadences in Minóre hasápiko songs. The cadence is completed with the standard I-V-I note shape in eighths. [sound example]

The relationship of the relative Minóre and Matzóre scales is the same as in Western music. The song *Θέλω να είναι Κυριακή* [I want it to be Sunday] uses a melodic shape found in Minóre and Ousák dhrómi that leads to the relative Matzóre dhrómos. Let's listen to it. [sound example]

His Master's Voice 7XGA 947 - 7PG 2911
Mixed zeimbékiko-2
B Minóre Natural // Armonikó
Time: 01.13

♩ = c. 55

Minóre to Matzóre

Bouzouki

καί χά-θη - κες χά - ρά μου
bouzouki

Mixed zeimbekiko-2

E_m **F[#]** **B_m** **D**

B Chord Chord B_V Chord B Chord Chord B_V Chord Chord

Figure 6: *Thélo na ine kiriaki* transcription (Tsitsánis)

There are many songs that give the sense of a modulation from one dhrómos to the other (Minóre to Matzóre or the other way around). The concept of the modulation results from the Western theory of the function of harmony. The dhrómi, however, combine the concepts of both West and East, that is, the harmony, the basic principles found in minor and major scales and so forth, as well as the idioms of the makams. Thus, a modulation is not always the case in the dhrómi. A short phrase in the relative Matzóre, cannot be considered as a modulation. However, there are cases where Western theory can take effect. For example, the basic thing that I consider important to hear in order to say that there is a Matzóre dhrómos inside a Minóre song is the fifth major chord of the Matzóre. Some examples of cases where the two dhrómi co-exist follow: the song *Ματσαράγκα*³ [matsaránga = cheat], apart from the aforementioned modulation, also includes another very interesting element found in rembétiko/laikó. This is the raised third (F sharp) found in the intro. Many times, an ascending movement towards the fourth degree of the dhrómos replaces its natural

³ HMV OGA 1000 - AO 2667, recorded in circa January, 1940.

third with a sharp third. This can be considered an idiom of the Minóre dhrómos. The third sharp note in such lines plays the role of the leading note towards the fourth [sound example].

HMV OGA 1000 - AO 2667
 New zeimbékiko
 D Minóre Armonikó // Minóre

♩ = 106

Intro

Melody

bouzouki

New zeimbékiko

G m **D m** **G m** **D m**

Chord B Chord Chord B Chord Chord

M.

New z.

F **C** **F** **F** **A** **D m**

B Ch Ch B Ch B Ch Ch B Ch Ch

Canto

M.

Εί - πως πως σου έ - κα - να α - πό - ψε μα - τσα - ρά - γκα (κα) τά - λα - βες τη μη - χα - νή που σου 'στη - σα ρε μά - γκα τη

New z.

D m **A** **D m** **F** **C** **F**

M.

μη - χα - νή που σου 'στη - σα στου Ά - λεω - ρα τη μάν - τρα

New z.

F **A** **D m**

Minóre to Matzóre

Figure 7: *Matsaránga* transcription (Tsitsánis)

One can notice some special cases of Minóre songs within Tsitsánis's corpus of recordings. These cases concern some interesting and rare combinations of dhrómi.

HMV OGA 1743 - AO 2984
 Aptáliko zeimbékiko monó
 B Minóre-Houseini // Kiourdí (Kartsighár)

♩ = 96

Melody *bouzouki* Kiourdí

Aptáliko zeimbékiko *Em* *Em*

M. *Kiourdí* *accordion* *bouzouki*

Apt. Z. *Dm* *A* *Dm* *Bm* *A* *Bm*

Figure 9: *Ghiá miá ghinéka háthika* transcription (Tsitsánis)

The most popular combination of the Minóre is with dhrómos Hitzáz. There is, however, a very simple explanation for this, if one considers the fact that a Hitzáz tetrachord already co-exists with the Minóre Armonikó dhrómos.

Dhrómos Minóre Armonikó

Dhrómos, Hitzáz

D Hitzáz 4-chord G Minóre 5-chord

Figure 10: The construction of dhrómi Hitzáz and Minóre Armonikó

An example of songs belonging in this category is the song entitled *Σε τούτο το παλιόσπιτο*⁶ [se toúto to palióspito = in this poor house] [sound example].

Another common phenomenon is the swift from Minóre to Matzóre, based on the same tonality. The song *Απ' τη μάνα μου διωγμένος*⁷ [ap' ti mána mou dhioghménos = rejected by my mother] is one of those cases.

⁶ Columbia CG 2799 - DG 6900, recorded on April 5, 1951.

⁷ Odeon GO 4050 - GA 7475, recorded on November 23, 1948.

Odeon GO 4050 - GA 7475
 Old zeimbékiko
 D Equal Mix: Matzóre - Minóre Armonikó
 Time: 00.14

♩ = c. 80

Voice

αὐτὴ μά-να μου διωγ-μέ-νος κλαῖ α - γά-πη ορ-φα-νός

Old zeimbékiko

Dm A A Dm A Dm

Bass Chord Chord Bass Chord Bass Chord Chord Bass Chord Chord

V.

έ - κα - να τους ὄρ - μους ζη - λει - τό πα - λά - τι μου ω

Bz.

tr tr tr tr

Old z.

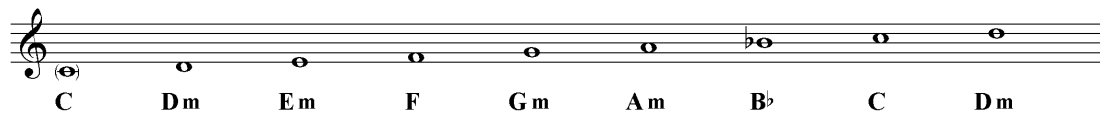
Dm A D D A

Figure 11: *Ap' ti mana mou dhioghménos* transcription (Tsitsánis)

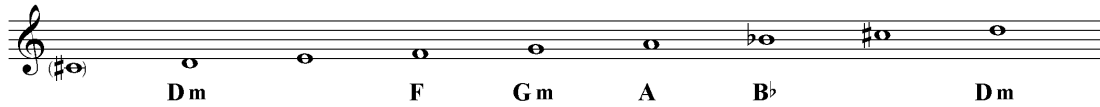
The unique element of this modulation is that it occurs unprepared, that is, without any particular chordal sequence which would show that a modulation is about to happen [sound example].

Finally, Figure 12, according to my findings, shows the chords used in each one of the two Minóre types, as well as in dhrómos Niavénd (only the chords written below the notes are used).

Dhrómos Minóre Natural



Dhrómos Minóre Armonikó



Dhrómos Niavénd



Figure 12: Chords used in Minóre Natural, Minóre Armonikó and Niavénd

The issue of the Greek popular modes is one of the biggest problems in rebetological field studies, and central to understanding the basis of Vasilis Tsitsanis compositional style. My paper aspired to shed light on this issue of the Minóre dhrómos by explaining the mode as well as by providing some musical examples from the songs of Tsitsanis. The explanation of the modes as well as the comparison with their ‘ancestors’, found in the Ottoman makam system, but also, in turn, in Byzantine and Ancient Greek modal systems, should be a vital part of future research in the field. An analysis of the dhrómi would show the development found in Greek popular music in general, which is owing to the fact that the foundations of today’s harmonization standards were set, to a great extent, by Vasilis Tsitsanis and his music.