
The Bulgarian Polyphonic Church Music (From 1878 to the 1930s)

Julian Kujumdzhev

Faculty of Musical Education, Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Email address:

j_kujum@hotmail.com

To cite this article:

Julian Kujumdzhev. The Bulgarian Polyphonic Church Music (From 1878 to the 1930s). *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Special Issue: Musical Theory, Psychology, Pedagogy and Performing. Vol. 3, No. 5-1, 2015, pp. 77-82. doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.s.2015030501.21

Abstract: The polyphonic choral singing is presented in Bulgaria after the Liberation from Turkish slavery in 1878. For the perceptions of our first professional musicians it is a musical “advancement” and chance for us to be raised up “next to the culturally elevated nations”. Polyphony is introduced mostly in the central part of the divine service – Liturgy. The first Bulgarian professional musicians (almost all of whom have passed through sacred choirs’ conducting) introduced sacred music in their creative work, understanding the necessity for establishment of a Bulgarian style of sacred music, of “national body of works for sacred singing”.

Keywords: East Orthodox Sacred Music, Bulgarian Polyphonic Church Music, “Bolgarskij Rospev”, Liturgy

1. Introduction

The East Orthodox sacred music draws the attention of performers and musical publishers more and more regularly in the last years. Although this music was given only a small and humble place in the repertoire of choir groups in the second half of the 20th century, today is a period of revival. The result is the emergence of a series of CDs with chants from different epochs and authors. Interpreted by some of the best Bulgarian choirs they complete the pictures of the East Orthodox sacred music. The major part of these records are polyphonic sacred works that have a strong impact with their multicolored choral sonority and also are very close to the contemporary liturgy of the Bulgarian churches.

2. The First Polyphonic Choral Works After the Liberation from Turkish Slavery

The polyphonic choral singing is presented in Bulgaria after the Liberation from Turkish slavery in 1878. For the perceptions of our first professional musicians it is a musical “advancement” and chance for us to be raised up “next to the culturally elevated nations” („до издигнатите в културно отношение нации“), says one of these musicians – the composer Dobri Cristov [3, p. 12]. This singing is considered

“European” and “harmonic”, distinguished from the inherited from the Renaissance monophonic acolyte tradition, wrongly considered as that time by most of the musicians as “foreign” and “Greek” [4, 9, 14]. A considerable impact for its formation has the Russian sacred singing.

Polyphony is introduced mostly in the central part of the divine service – Liturgy. In the beginning, the repertoire of the many newly emerging church choir is built entirely on works by Russian composers – Bortnyanski, Archangelski, Davidov, Bachmetiev, Simonov, Lvov, Tchaikovski and others, which satisfies the need of polyphonic choral compositions. The first polyphonic Liturgy in Bulgaria is published in 1885 in Varna, but without author – maybe it has been from Russian issue. Its publisher is Racho Rachov – music teacher and publisher mostly of textbooks.

Also, the first Bulgarian professional musicians (almost all of whom have passed through sacred choirs’ conducting) introduced sacred music in their creative work, understanding the necessity for establishment of a Bulgarian style of sacred music of “national body of works for sacred singing” (национални образци на религиозно пеење) [2, p. 3]. “The Bulgarian church has to have a “national sacred singing of its own”, (свое собствено религиозно пеење) [12, p. 5] writes Petar Dinev and stresses that it could not “use and be satisfied with the Russian sacred singing forever” („да използват и да са удовлетворени от руското религиозно пеење завинаги“) [12, p. 5]. A number a Bulgarian musicians from the end of the

19th and the first decades of the 20th century work in this specific field of composition. Among them are Emanuil Manolov, Atanas Badev, Panayot Pipkov, Alexandar Morfov, Dragomir Kazakov, Ivan Kyulev, Anastas Nikolov, Alexandar Krastev, Nikolai Nikolaev, Dobri Christov, Apostol Nikolaev-Strumski, Petar Dinev [7, p. 25 – 51]. The lasting

interest in this field of composition reaches its peak in the musical translation of the fundamental and most often used liturgical sequence – the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. The more than 20 complete liturgical cycles that emerged, outline the line of polyphonic sacred music (developing for several decades), which features several trends [7, p. 25 – 51].



Figure 1. The Liturgy published by R. Rachov.

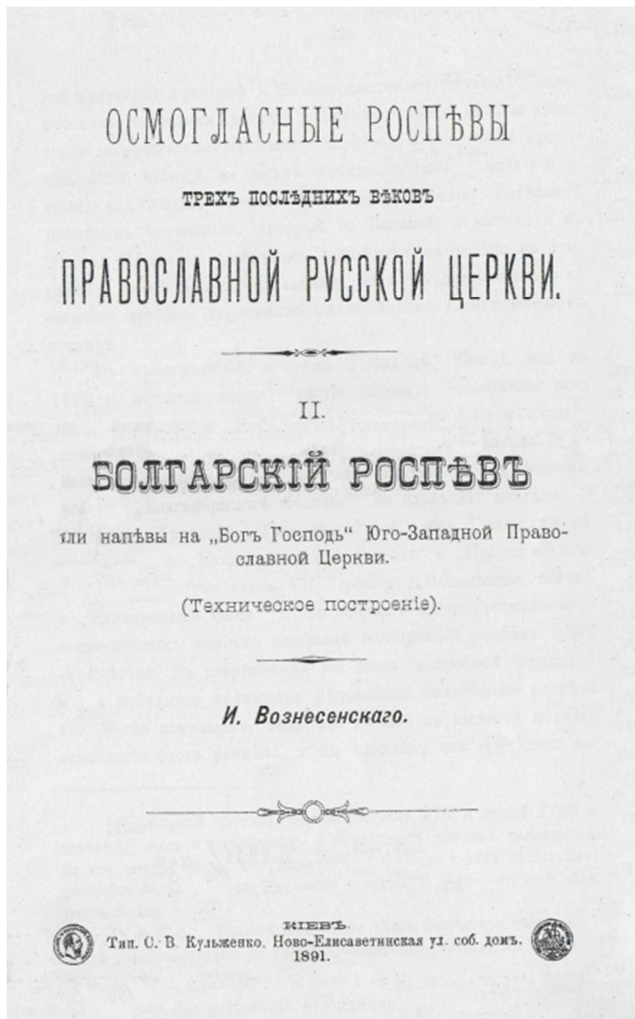
3. The Three Directions in the Creation of the Bulgarian Sacred Music Style

3.1. "Bolgarskij Rospev" and Its Influence on Bulgarian Composers at the Beginning of 20th Century

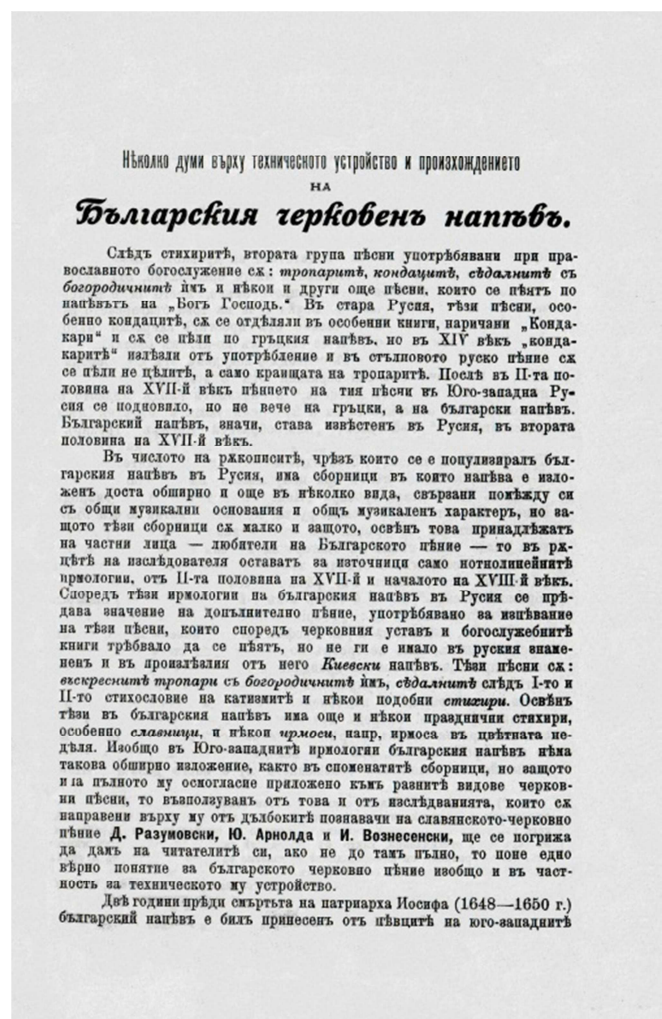
The problem of "Bolgarskij Rospev" became known in Bulgaria after the translation of the Ivan Voznesensky's book in 1891 "Bolgarskij Rospev ili napevi na 'Bog Gospod' jugozapadnoj pravoslavnoj cerkvi". The book was translated from Russian into Bulgarian and published in 1899 by Georgi Baidanov. But Baidanov put the name of Voznesensky as the author of the book [8].

At the beginning of the last century the "Bolgarskij Rospev" ("Bulgarian Chant") is famous in Bulgaria – the melodies under this title are found in Russian manuscripts from 17th and 18th centuries. In 1905 Nikolov published in Peterburg found by him melodies from Russian manuscripts under the title "Old-Bulgarian Church Chant According to the Old-Russian

Notated Manuscripts of the 17th and 18th Centuries". They are welcomed by a great part of the Bulgarian musical society as the original Bulgarian sacred music tradition and initiate the dispute for the "true Bulgarian sacred singing" („истинско българско религиозно пеене“) [4, 6, 10, 14]. The dispute opposed two possible choices for melodic material on the basis of which to create the new Bulgarian sacred music. One of them is the development of the polyphonic liturgical compositions over melodies from "Bolgarskij Rospev", which many Bulgarian musicians at that time define as "true Bulgarian church singing". These melodies stirred comments about the "Old Bulgarian church singing" („старобългарско църковно пеене“), the tradition of which had been forgotten in Bulgaria during the five centuries of enslavement, but had survived by being transferred northwards to other Christian Orthodox countries. In 1921 Anastas Nikolov publishes Liturgy for homogeneous choir, which is actually a harmonization of the melodies from "Bolgarskij Rospev", found by him and published in 1905.



a



b

Figure 2. a, b. The book by Voznesensky and the 1st page of the book by Baidanov.

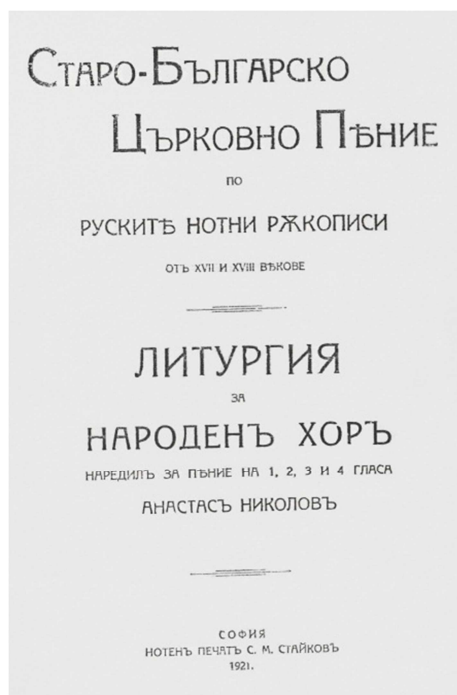


Figure 3. The Liturgy by Anastas Nikolov.



Figure 4. "Milost mira" ("Mercy of peace") on melody of "Bolgarskij Rospev" from Liturgy for mixed choir by D. Christov.

Dobri Christov also uses in both of his liturgies "Old Bulgarian chants" – in the first liturgy for mixed choir (1924), they are used as a basis for a significant number of the parts, and in the second liturgy for homogeneous choir (1934) only for two, but the composer underlines that most of the chants there are "in the spirit of the East Orthodox Slavonic music with prevailing tone of Old Bulgarian church chant" ("в духа на Източно-православната славянска музика с преобладаване на старобългарското църковно пеење") [1, p. 5].

3.2. A Harmonization of East Orthodox Acolyte Melodies

The second direction in the creation of the Bulgarian sacred music style is the harmonization, with the means of European polyphony, of the traditional for our divine service (for more than thousand years) East Orthodox acolyte melodies. In the far 1898 Atanas Badev publishes in Leipzig his "Zlatoustova liturgia" (the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom), built up in its major part of East Orthodox chants [11].

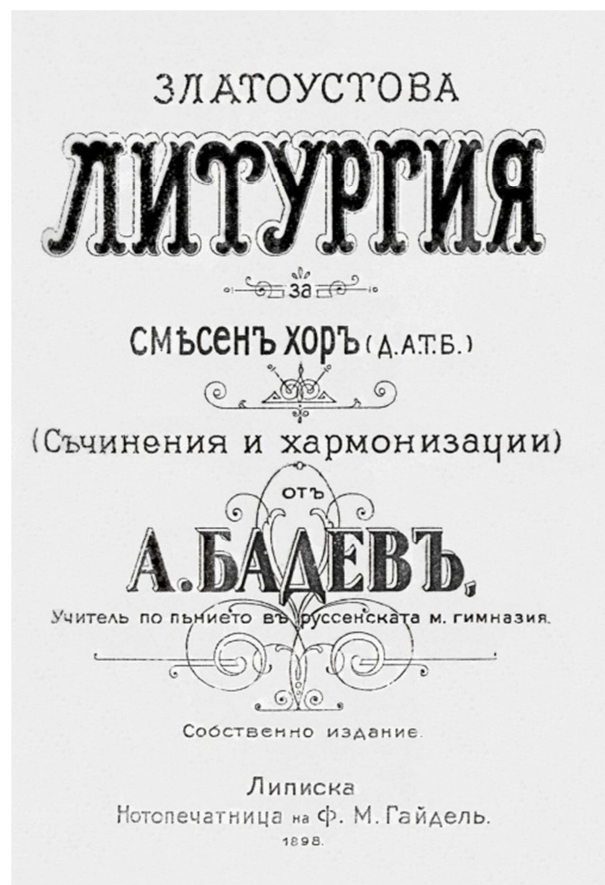


Figure 5. The Liturgy by A. Badev. On the cover of Liturgy is written: Works and harmonisations.

His strive to create Bulgarian sacred singing, "close to the understanding of our people" („близо до разбиранията на нашия народ“) [13, p. 5], by the words of Peter Dinev, is continued by Dinev himself in his Liturgy for mixed choir (1926) and in his "Folk liturgy for homogeneous choir" (1929, second enlarged edition 1936). According to Dinev only East

Orthodox chants could be used for the creation of “our national sacred singing” (наше национално религиозно пеене) [13, p. 6].

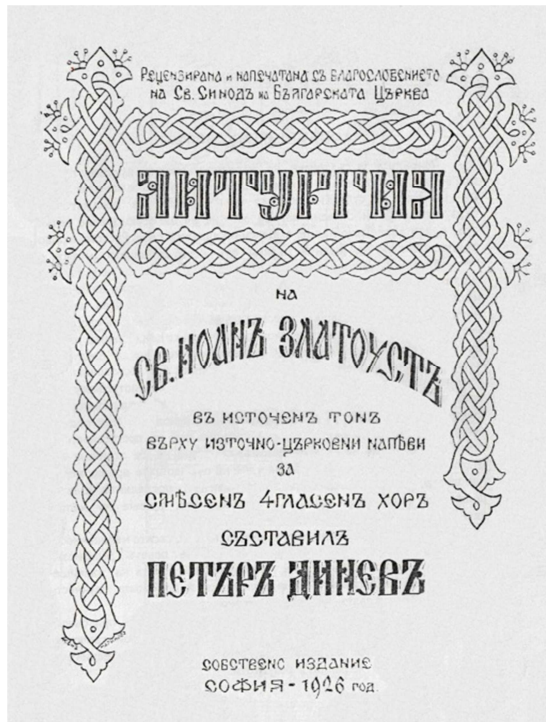


Figure 6. Liturgy for mixed choir by P. Dine.

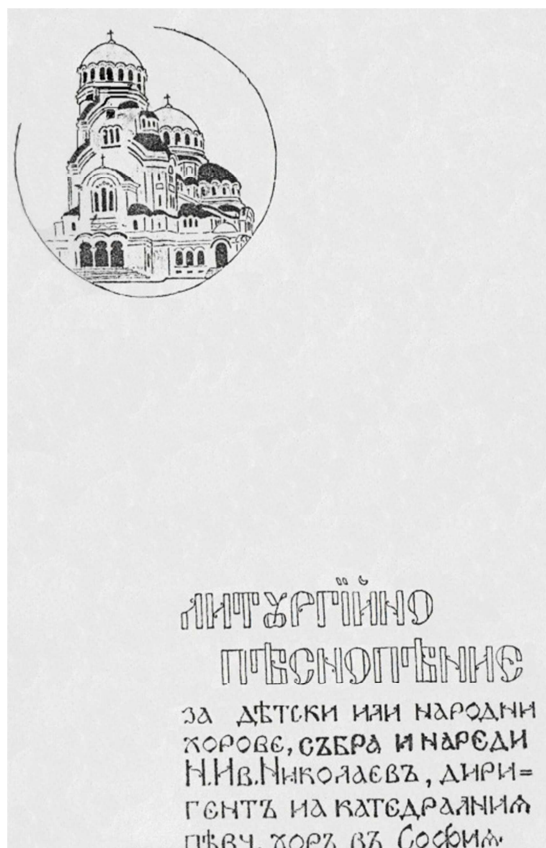


Figure 7. Liturgy compiled and ordered by N. Nikolaev.

Simultaneously, the importance of the Russian sacred music still has a significant position in the first half of the 20th c. The attitude towards this music as an example that has to be followed, is found in a number of liturgical cycles, looking for the correct reading of the “mastery”. These are Russian sacred music compositions adapted for homogeneous choir, “ordered” or “arranged” in one complete sequence. Examples are the liturgies of Ivan Kyulev (1906), Dragomir Kazakov (between 1906 and 1908), Ivan Shopov (1910), Nikolay Nikolaev (1924), Alexander Krastev (1929) [7, p. 30 – 37].

3.3. The Influence of the Russian Tradition

The specific rationalization, understanding and attitude towards the sources (author’s selection and edition) forms a third direction in the search of national style of sacred music, which grows up from the Russian tradition transferred to Bulgaria. The most vivid example of this tendency are the Liturgy of Alexander Morfov (1909) and especially the Liturgy for mixed choir of Apostol Nikolaev-Strumski (1934), composed in the tradition of the Russian concert sacred music of the second half of the 19th c. [7, p. 45 – 46].

Despite the significant achievements in the field of our new sacred music, the lack of succession between our first musical authors after the Liberation and the next Bulgarian composers (of the 20’s and 30’s of the last century) leads to a gradual discontinuance of the tradition. The processes of secularization in the Bulgarian culture determine the orientation of the, then young authors to compositions where the idea for divine service, which is intrinsic for sacred music, is not topical. Sacred music – part of the ritual of the divine service – in which it has emerged, is not a subject of the attention of composers, aiming to build national music style with the means of secular genres.

The only Bulgarian composer who continued fully the tradition of our first musicians in the field of sacred music in the 30’s and 40’s of previous century is Christo Manolov. He is the author of an impressive body of liturgical works which, however, has remained on the script, and not known to his contemporaries. So far, they are discovered 6 liturgies, 2 Vespers and a number of lesser works, which reveal intensive work in the field of sacred music. [5, p. 23 – 30]. The comments “in Old Bulgarian style” (в старобългарски стил) written on some of them reveal the will of Christo Manolov to continue the quest of our first composers for the creation of a Bulgarian style of sacred music, and the body of his liturgical music shows a previously unknown attitude towards a repeated, in musical aspect different modification of the main liturgical sequence [5, p. 23 – 30].

His early death in 1953 interrupts these processes but undoubtedly his sacred music compositions have rich potential for research of the lay stage of the development of the Bulgarian sacred music after the Liberation until the middle of the 20th c.

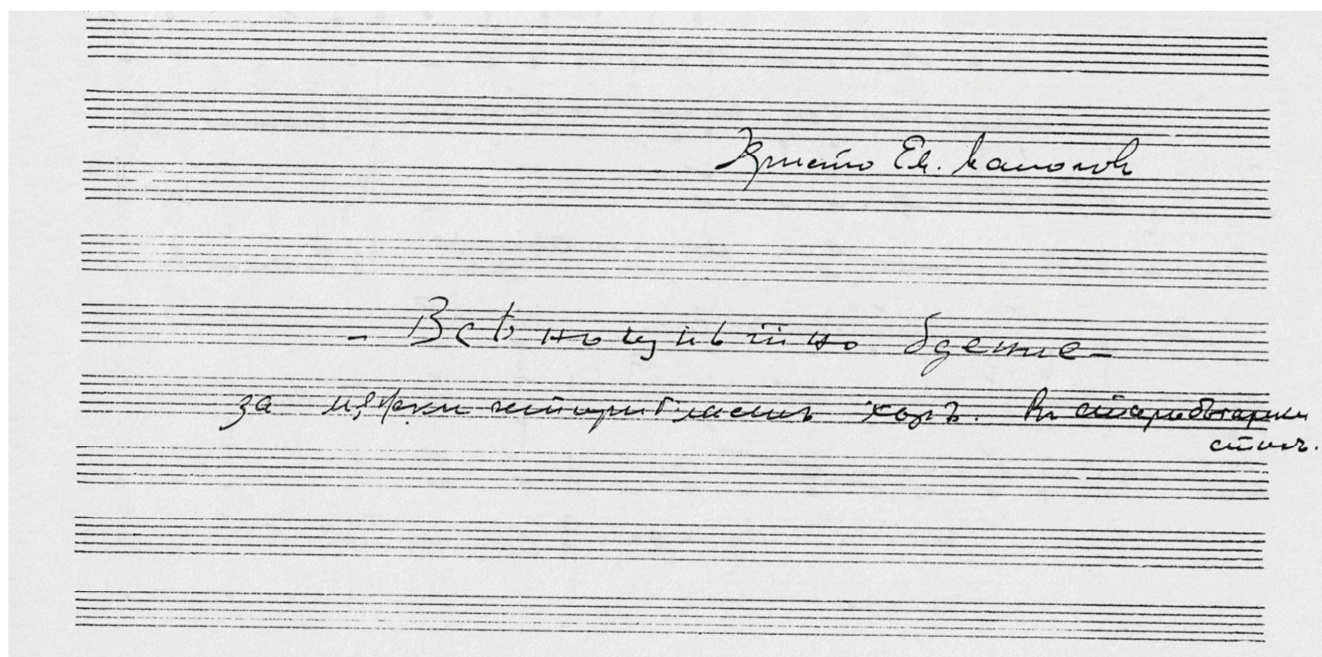


Figure 8. Vesper by Chr. Manolov in Bulgarian style. Manuscript.

References

- [1] Dobri Hristov. Accessible liturgy № 2. Preface. (Общодостъпна литургия № 2. Предговор). Sofia, 1934.
- [2] Dobri Christov. Orthodox church singing. (Православното църковно пеене). Muzikalen zhivot, 1931, № 20.
- [3] Dobri Christov. The choir church singing. (Хоровото църковно пеене). Dobri Christov. Muzikalnoteoreticheskо i publitsisticheskо nasledstvo. T. 1, Sofia, 1967.
- [4] Elena Toncheva. The monastery “Big Skit” – school of “Bolgarkij Rospev”. (Манастирът „Голям Скит” – школа на „Болгарский роспев”). Sofia, 1981.
- [5] Julian Kujumdzhiev. An attempt about new view to Christo Manolov. (Опит за нов поглед към Христо Манолов). Sofia, 2005, p. 23 – 30.
- [6] Julian Kujumdzhiev. Cultural-Historical aspects of the discussion on the authentic Bulgarian church singing. (Културноисторически аспекти на дискусията за истинското българско църковно пеене). Plovdiv, 2013.
- [7] Julian Kujumdzhiev. Polyphonic liturgy in Bulgarian music from liberation to the 1930s. (Многогласната литургия в българската музика от Освобождението до 30-те години на XX век). Sofia, 2003.
- [8] Julian Kujumdzhiev. “Some worlds about the technical organization and the origin of Bulgarian church melodies by Georgi Baydanov – translate and authorship. („Няколко думи върху техническото устройство и произхождението на българския черковен напев” от Георги Байданов – превод и авторство). Proletni cheteniya, Sofia, NMA, 2011.
- [9] Julian Kujumdzhiev. The church music after liberation between the “Old” and the “New”. (Църковната музика след Освобождението между „старото” и „новото”). Balgarsko muzikoznanie, 2000, № 2, 127 – 135.
- [10] Julian Kujumdzhiev (compiler). What is the authentic Bulgarian church singing? (Кое е истинското българско църковно пеене?). Plovdiv, 2011.
- [11] Petar Dinev. Church singing works of Atanas Badev. (Църковнопевческото творчество на Атанас Бадев). Duhovna kultura, 1960, № 12.
- [12] Petar Dinev. Liturgy of St. John Chrisostom on East church themes. Preface. (Литургия на св. Йоан Златоуст върху източноцърковни мотиви. Предговор). Sofia, 1926.
- [13] Petar Dinev. The contemporary state of church music in Bulgaria. (Съвременното състояние на църковната музика в България). Muzikalna misal, 1936 – 1937, № 1.
- [14] Svetlana Kujumdzieva. ““Bulgarian Chant’ through the view of the first Bulgarian musical and public figures after the Liberation”. („Болгарский роспев” през погледа на първите български музикалнообществени дейци след Освобождението). Balgarsko muzikoznanie, 1, 1982, 59 – 72.