

BYZANTINE OCTOECHOS CHART FOR THOSE TRAINED IN WESTERN MUSIC

This is a simplified chart indicating the most frequently used modes and does not take into account the hundreds of characteristic melodic formulas based on syllabic patterns, nor does it cover the ornaments and other characteristics of Byzantine music, a highly complex and arcane vocal art form.

NOTE: Check the glossary below for term definitions. Scale steps are indicated using the letter names of Western staff notation, however, their pitch is approximate, because they do not indicate the exact pitch of the Byzantine genres, which have their own special tuning. A common range for pitches is given for each mode. Melodies may go beyond these ranges on both ends of the scale. Finals are indicated in bold. Medials are in parentheses. These can be considered the main notes for the “ison” voice as well.

THE AUTHENTIC TONES (ĒCHI)

Name:	1. FIRST TONE (ĒCHOS)	2. SECOND TONE	3. THIRD TONE	4. FOURTH TONE
Genre:	Diatonic	Soft Chromatic	Enharmonic	Diatonic
Heirmological:	C-D-E-F-(G)-A-Bb/B-C-D	(E)-F-G-A-B	C-(D)-E-F-(G)-A-Bb-C	C-(D)-E-F-(G)-A-B-C
Sticheraric:	B-C-D-E-F-(G)-A-Bb	(E)-F-G-A-B-C	C-(D)-E-F-G-(A)-Bb/B-C	(More use of the D medial)
Footnotes:	In the diatonic genre, if the melody ascends to C or above, B is natural; on descent, B is flat.	In the soft chromatic genre, A is slightly flattened. The same applies to D if the melody descends to C. (Second Tone also has a hard chromatic heirmological mode.)	The enharmonic genre is the rough equivalent of a Western equal-tempered F-major scale.	Fourth Tone has several common modes, each with its own special characteristics, including a soft chromatic heirmological mode.

THE PLAGAL TONES

Name:	5. PLAGAL FIRST TONE	6. PLAGAL SECOND TONE	7. GRAVE TONE	8. PLAGAL FOURTH TONE
Genre:	Diatonic	Soft and Hard Chromatic	Enharmonic	Diatonic
Heirmological:	(G)-A-B-(C)-D-E	C-D-(E)-F-G-A-B (Soft)	(C)-(D)-E-F-(G)-A-Bb-C	C-(D)-E-(F)-(G)-A-B-C-D
Sticheraric:	C-D-E-F-(G)-(A)-B-C-D	C#-D-Eb-F#-(G)-(A)-Bb-C#-D	(More use of Bb)	C-D-(E)-F-(G)-A-B-C
Footnotes:	Plagal First Tone sticheraric is tetrachordal—phrases alternate between tetrachords (four-note sub-scales) based on D and A.	The notes of the hard chromatic genre are indicated above in the sticheraric mode of Plagal Second Tone.	Grave Tone is also known as <i>Varys</i> . It also has a common diatonic form with a base on Bb.	Plagal Fourth has an heirmological mode known as “triphonos,” which is a transposition to a final of F.

Glossary

octoechos (“eight-tone”)—A system of eight tonal families, each with its own melodic and modal characteristics. The word *ēchos* is often translated both as “tone” and as “mode.” An echos (tone) is actually a family of related modes.

authentic tones – the four oldest families of related modes.

plagal tones – related to authentic, but with different finals, medials, formulas, etc.

final (*noun*) – The last note of an ending phrase (final cadence) in a melody. It is considered the tonal center of the melody.

medial – The last note of an intermediate phrase (nonfinal cadence) in a melody.

ison – (*isokratima*) A second voice droned against the melody. It is usually pitched on the last note of a phrase, so most isons drone on finals or medials

genre – Similar to a scale, a Byzantine genre is one of four series of scale steps that exhibit a consistent pattern of different distances between pitches.

heirmological – A rhythmic style that is primarily one note per syllable of text.

sticheraric – A style that is mostly two or more slurred notes per syllable of text.

papadic – A third rhythmic style, not included in this chart, that has its own modal characteristics and uses many notes on each syllable of text.