GEORGIAN BATONEBI SONGS

The Batonebi songs are associated with the cult of Batonebi (children's infectious diseases such as measles, whooping cough, chicken pox, etc.). They are known almost all over Georgia by different names - iavnana, nanina, sabodisho, and mobodishneba. These songs are inseparable from the rituals based on ancient beliefs and concepts. The mythological traditions that have survived in different parts of Georgia provide eloquent testimony to the longevity of the Batonebi cult and its great significance.

According to these beliefs, Batonebi are the spirits residing beyond the sea. From time to time their master sends them to different places to find out how loyal the mortals are. They are also supposed to kill the disobedient or to take them as slaves (Sakhokia, 1956:23-25). Together with the Batonebi the souls of those suffering from infectious diseases live in the land of the Batonebi (Bardavelidze, 1957:79): The locals in Lechkhumi think that Batonbni exist "by the will of God", "they are created by God and they are angels" (Zumbadze, 1989a). Batonebi should never be opposed because it infuriates them, but by complete obedience, caresses and kind words one can win their hearts and avoid disaster (Sakhokia, 1956:24).

The rituals to be performed during illness are associated with the cult of Nana — the Great Mother of Georgians and her children (Bardavelidze, 1957:81). The devotional rituals mainly include walking around the sick person carrying gifts, offering apologies and seeing off the disease (Bardavelidze, 1957:85). Everything is performed to the accompaniment of music (a song, a musical instrument or both). These rituals must have been born of the following beliefs: Batonebi are never indifferent to sweet songs and are especially fond of the clear sounds of some musical instruments. They themselves play the chonguri quietly, producing charming sounds to the delight of the visitors (Sakhokia, 1956:24, 34). Batonebi sing Nana to the prince lying in the crib (Makalatia, 1971:69). When hearing the sounds of the panduri they do not get angry and the patient calmly overcomes the illness (Shilakadze, 1970:31).

Batonebi singers and performers on musical instruments are mainly women taking part in the ritual. Gurians invited a man to join the women if he knew the prayers (Nadariaia, 1980:200). In Kartli, men could take part in the ritual of seeing the Batonebi if they were family members (Makalatia, 1971:70). However, men also knew Batonebi songs and performed them (more often in Guria and Imereti in Western Georgia). This is attested to by musical transcriptions and audio materials.

By their provenance and manner of performance, Batonebi songs are remnants of an ancient life pattern. They combine characteristics of different arts and are performed while participants in the ritual are walking. When the sabodisho ritual is performed in Guria, singers walk around the patient's room singing a song in Nana's honour (Bardavelidze, 1957:88). In Racha when seeing off the Batonebi they walk around the child three times while singing (Zumbadze, 1989b). In Svaneti, during the same ritual they go to the crossroads playing the chuniri and singing (Burduli, 1990:146). During the ritual of "the Invitation of Smallpox" they take a musical instrument to the patient's house and go back home playing it (Burduli, 1990:144).

The performers do not perceive Batonebi songs as just songs. They are prayers offered to the deities, and glorifying them. These songs are appeals, supplications, entreaties, and prayers expressed in songs which the performers understand very well (see Zumbadze, 1989b:77-79). The main function of these songs is to stir pity in the deities so that they will show mercy to the sick person. In this way the performers try to win the deities' favor.
Singing is an obligatory devotional ritual element to appeal to the Batonebi and glorify them. It is a means of communicating with the deities and imploring them. At the same time the singing itself has a curative function. That is why Batonebi songs are performed by the servants of their cults. In different parts of Georgia these servants are known by different names: Batonebis namida (aunt), melodišhe (apologizer), gamo-miotsavi (incantation chanter), shemkhvetsa (explorer), which in popular imagination all correspond to the Batonebi's mother.

The participation of a musical instrument in rituals connected with the cult of infectious diseases is also very important (see Zumbadze, 1994a). Its function is like that of singing and is a means of communication with the deities.

The words khveutara (entreaty), vedreba (imploring), tkhovna (request) and lutsva (prayer) in rituals associated with the Batonebi cult denote the main ritual activities accompanied by a song of supplication (or by some musical instrument). That is why the musical aspect sometimes may be implied in rituals where there is neither singing nor playing of instruments (see Zumbadze, 1997:97-98).

Batonebi songs have been recorded in Kartli, Kakheti, Meskheti, Khvei, Racha, Imereti, Lechkhumi, Samegrelo and Guria. A study of specialist literature, fieldwork materials and similar intonational songs in women's repertoires in some Georgian provinces enable me to suggest the following. The ritual is performed by the bedside of a person suffering from an infectious disease must have been accompanied by music in the old days (see Zumbadze, 1997:139-137).

In Svaneti songs are sung and musical instruments played during the ritual of 'the Invitation of Smallpox'. In Racha they do the same during the feast to glorify Batonebi. On the one hand the role of music in the period of an infectious disease (or during the ritual of 'the Invitation of Smallpox', or during the holiday dedicated to Batonebi) and the popular approach to Batonebi songs can be reliably used to prove that in the old days other Batonebi rituals were also accompanied by music.

Most Batonebi songs are founded on a single intonational formula. It is the basic lullaby or lavnana melody – an initial ascending movement, usually from the 3rd. step of the mode, sometimes from its higher variant (see ex. 1). This is the melody meant 'for glorification, an intonation of supplication and appeal to the deity' (Aslanishvili, 1954:142, 234). In each case it changes according to factors such as musical dialect, the environment in which it is performed, and custom. The beginning may have a distinct change in intonation, called saktsavi. This is similar but from the 4th or 5th step of the mode (see ex. 2). In a number of cases the songs have a different melodic character, which is brought closer to the tune of lavnana by means of definite mimoktseva (changes in intonation). In some cases the links are very remote (see ex. 3, 4).

Most Batonebi songs are characterized by a regularly accented rhythm. Quite often there is also a round dance triple time with soft syncopation or changes in the time (with clearly predominant triple rhythm). Sometimes a four-beat time also occurs. Batonebi songs are mainly polyphonic (see Zumbadze, 2000), and some are recorded as solo performances. In this case a song that is to be performed collectively is sung by one person, since the song is performed in an unusual situation (see ex. 5). Unison parts are much less frequent in polyphonic songs, and the unison performance of the main melody is also rare. Such forms of performance are due to the fact that they are recorded in non-traditional environments. They reflect changes in the musical scene.

The polyphony of Batonebi songs is a phenomenon conditioned by their genre, the social environment in which they are performed, and other specific points. It is a means of mutual intoning and relationship between participants in the ritual. In a traditional environment, amongst participants in the ritual, these songs must be polyphonic. Also, adjustments in polyphonic performance are brought about through variations of genre and the conditions of performance.
Thus the songs, which are recorded in non-traditional environments do not have this inter-relationship, and cannot strictly be called polyphonic. But ethnophores (carriers of the traditional culture, the term suggested by Zemtsovsky) still refer to the polyphony of the song. The characteristic elements of polyphonic singing (most often the lower 7th degree of the scale) are present in unison and solo versions. The fact that polyphonic singing does not take place is also reflected in the music (see ex. 6, 7).

In two-part singing the main melody is sung by the high part, and in three-part singing by the middle part. The only exception is the three-part version, where the main melody is sung either by the high part or distributed between two high parts. In popular belief, the middle part (called diamtsqebi – “the one who starts the song”) is the first part (even though in fact it is a middle part). This is followed by the second part, which is the highest part. In most cases the part that starts the song carries the melody.

The bass part of East Georgian songs is mainly limited by two degrees ($1^{\text{st}}$, $7^{\text{th}}$) of the scale. There is also a three-degree bass, where the $1^{\text{st}}$ degree is replaced by the $6^{\text{th}}$. The bass of West Georgian songs is mainly three-degree ($1^{\text{st}}$, $6^{\text{th}}$, $7^{\text{th}}$). There is also another version with three degrees ($1^{\text{st}}$, $6^{\text{th}}$, $2^{\text{nd}}$), where the $2^{\text{nd}}$ substitutes the $7^{\text{th}}$ degree. Sometimes, even the $3^{\text{rd}}$ and $2^{\text{nd}}$ degrees are used as substitutes for the $1^{\text{st}}$ and $7^{\text{th}}$. There is also a version with a bass with four degrees ($1^{\text{st}}$, $2^{\text{nd}}$, $3^{\text{rd}}$, $7^{\text{th}}$), and another version (Gurian Balonebi) with a bass with six degrees ($1^{\text{st}}$, $7^{\text{th}}$, $6^{\text{th}}$, $5^{\text{th}}$, $4^{\text{th}}$, $2^{\text{nd}}$).

Most Batonebi songs have refrains. In polyphonic songs the refrain corresponds to the area of the $7^{\text{th}}$ harmonic degree. In the one-part versions it corresponds to an implied $7^{\text{th}}$ step.

East Georgian songs are characterized by the drone-type polyphony with pedal and recitative bass either separately or together. In the second case the recitative drone is mainly at the end of the stanza (see ex. 8, 9). In West Georgian musical dialects there are songs both of the drone (recitative) and chordal unit types of polyphony. Sometimes the latter is mixed with the recitative drone elements (see ex. 10, 11).

Kakhetian versions of the Batonebi songs are orpiiruli (antiphonal). This manner of singing is based on a specific dialogue-type musical performance. The soloists alternate against the background of one bass part (usually a drone). In such a performance the second side repeats the exact verbal text of the first side (though the melody may be exactly the same or varied). There are overlapping cadences. The songs of other provinces are tsalipiruli, which is sung by one soloist. But in Kartli and Racha versions remains of the earlier two-soloists alternating singing can be found. This is an ascending 4th overlapping with the melody at the end of the stanza (the repeated verbal text). Comparison of the orpiiruli (antiphonal) and tsalipiruli (non-antiphonal) versions shows that the earlier form of performance was antiphonal. This is revealed in the behavior of the performers (interruption of a song by one soloist and starting it again by the other).

Two-part singing of Kartli-Kakhetian Batonebi songs is an older form of polyphony. Three-part singing emerged somewhat later, evolving from the two-part system. This is indicated by a comparative study of two-part and three-part variants and by data obtained during fieldwork. In the three-part versions the middle part leads. In two-part variants the high part leads and the first part depends on it and follows it. It should also be noted that the absence from two-part songs of the high ($1^{\text{st}}$) part present in three-part songs does not have any negative influence on the artistic expression of those songs.

Often, the emergence of three-part singing is connected with building an octave on the bass part of the two-part songs. However, the high part seems to have progressed quite a long way in the three-part variants of Batonebi songs and to have acquired a distinct melodic function.

In some Batonebi songs the emergence of three-part singing causes the replacement of the antiphonal performance by the non-antiphonal one. Sometimes, the antiphonal
The form of singing is stronger than the three-part singing impulse and as a result, in spite of becoming three-part, the song remains antiphonal.

Nowadays, dramatic changes are taking place in rural life, and the social conditions for performing the rituals associated with the Batonebi cult have disappeared. Yet Batonebi songs still remain in the memory of those who adhere to Georgian traditions and ancient beliefs and concepts. Their centuries-old heritage of polyphonic singing and the traditional form of antiphonal performance lives on.

Translated by LIANA GABECHAVA

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Аварская песнь 1. 


Аварская песнь 2.


EXAMPLE 3. Ia Patonepi. Recorded and transcribed by N. Zumbadze (Samegrelo, 1989).

EXAMPLE 8. lavnana. Recorded by G. Chkhikvadze (Kakheti, 1952); transcribed by N. Zumbadze.
