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### THE GEORGIAN CALENDAR SONG FOR EASTER *TCHONA*

The Easter song *Tchona*, as well as the Christmas song *Alilo*, the songs of the Georgian carnival *Berikoba*, the weather songs *Lazare*, *Elia*, *Gonja* etc. belongs to the so called calendar songs. They were performed once a year, as a rule on the previous day of a holiday. Customs are conservative in essence: they are viable even then, when the reason of their conception is already wiped off the memory of people. According to Vakhtang Kotetishvili (1967:295), often "the performer does not believe in the power of the custom, but he still performs it." Traces of previous epochs are felt in form and content of the calendar rituals and songs. Prehistorically the solstices and the equinoxes laid the base for the agricultural calendar and its holidays, which for the last time was newly understood by Christianity. Thus, calendar customs represent a conglomerate of different historical layers, which we perhaps never will be able to separate.

The calendar songs are mostly part of a ritual: singers walk from home to home, singing congratulation songs for the holiday and ask for a "reward" too. In addition to these general characteristics calendar rituals and songs have several other repetitive elements in common.

1. On the most part the term *Tchona*, is connected with "*choni* – hatter-furrier, which made also clothes, (Chikobava 1964; column 1282) and is explained as a hint of mummers and masks in order not to recognize those, who ask for a reward (Chikovani 1976: 310, other etymologies see Mamaladse 1963: 246). The usage of masks, made of "pumpkins with a human face depicted on them" (Chikovani 1976: 317), is proved for upper Imereti. But a thorough mummery was typical not for the Easter ritual *Tchona*, but for the Georgian carnival *Berikaoba*, held during the previous days of the Lent, where fur garment was used for the representation of the obligatory animals bear and goat.

2. In some regions, f. e. in Mtiuleti (Giorgadze 1993: 13), or Kakheti (recording by Gr. Chkhikvadse in Veliscikhe, 10. 7. 1952, Phonothek of the Tbilissi Conservatoire), the term *Tchona* is used also for the Christmas ritual respectively song.

3. "Alatasa, balatasa, put your hand in the basket, take out an egg, God will bless you". Such lines we meet in almost all versions of *Tchona*. But not only there: In Khevi (Makalatia 1934: 190) and Upper Imereti (Tsereteli 1893: 8), they appear in *Berikaoba* songs, in Mtiuleti in an *Alilo* (Christmas Song), as for Achara, they are found in the weather song *Lazare* (Giorgadze 1993: 22).

In the existence of such repetitive elements one can see a sign of the rituals vanishing. But as well we can interpret them as a quality of calendar rituals: "The original meaning of going from home-to-home lies not in this or that concrete and the only primordial timing, but in its cyclic repetition". (Zemtsovski 1973:47). Though, it must be mentioned, that this does not imply by any means that the different home-to-home rituals and their the songs have not their own peculiarities.

#### I

*Tchona* differs from other going from home-to-home songs especially in its musical structure. Before comparing and generalising *Tchonas* musical versions, it must be mentioned, that the song is spread only locally in Kartli, Mtiuleti, Meskheta, Djavakheti, the north regions of Imereti (Kharagauli, Sachkhere, Tchiatura) and eventually in Ratcha<sup>1</sup>. Musical recordings and notations were accessible to me only from Kartli and Imereti.

Guided by seven versions from Kartli, the music scholar Tamar Mamaladze notices, that three-part singing in *Tchona* is still “in an embryo state. The main melody and the text are lead by the middle part, while the first part together with bass only accompanies the melody” (Mamaladze 1964:248). The seven additional versions accessible to me, corroborate this consideration. The versions from Kartli can be viewed in a line, leading from two-part singing to the developed independence of the upper voices in a three-part setting:

1. As a previous stage of three-part singing can be considered the alternating of the two upper voices (K1, K2): If one by and by lowers down to enter in unison with the drone, then the other starts. Sometimes it continues this unison, while the second voice is active; then we can speak of nominal three-part singing. Both parts sing not only at different times, they also undertake different tasks: starting and telling the text is the objective of one, while the other one sings without words (see ex. 1).

2. In the simplest form of three-part singing the upper part doubles the drone at an octave (K3 - K7). This happens mostly while the middle voice pronounces the text. If the upper part begins to move melodically itself, the middle one dies down; the song remains two-part (see ex. 2).

3. The doubling of the bass by the first voice may pass into a transition section, where the modulation on an other drone step is prepared and determined (K8 - K10). The development of the both soloists’ “partnership” interaction starts in such sections. If it becomes the leading principle, we are not far from the table songs which represent the peak of East-Georgian three-part polyphony. In *Tchona* nevertheless, remains of the former development stage are noticeable: every new phrase of the upper voice starts an octave higher than the drone (see ex. 3).

4. Homophonic three-part singing is created when the upper voice together with the middle one pronounces the text, starting, of course, an octave over the drone (K11 - K14). The previous improvisation-like character of the text recitation disappears this way. Recitation gradually turns into melody. The song acquires a fixed rhythmic order, and not only this: every such version is characterized with more or less strongly pronounced three-bar periodicals (see ex. 4).

Certainly, we don’t claim to reveal all the characteristic features of *Tchona*, all the more, that some of them cannot be considered to be peculiarities of *Tchona* only, as for example the two-step drone<sup>2</sup>, always finishing on the upper step, or the dominance of mixolydic mode in alternating with the doric.

## II

The most Imereti versions of *Tchona* are from the Kharagauli region, where the song is still known. The five versions known to me represent variants of one prototype.

From the first side, of course, the difference of musical dialect is obvious: even rhythmic order; two-bar periodicals; homophonic part setting; clearly pronounced cadenzas; the upper voices never leave the limits of an octave (see ex. 5). Somebody may think, that Kartli and Imereti *Tchona* “have nothing much in common” (Garakanidze 1990: 116). But still we think that Imereti *Tchona* has not come from Kartli.

If we observe more precisely, we find fundamental parallels: All Imereti *Tchonas* include a quite long two-part section, which is not typical for the region (see ex. 6). At least once we meet the doubling of the bass on an octave, in the manner we have noticed as homophonic three-part singing among the versions from Kartli. The middle voice is leading in the telling of the text. There are remains of antiphony in Imereti as well as in

Kartli (K14, Kargareteli 1899:8). In Figure 6 two bars out of the two-part section are performed by an other middle voice singer.

From the Kvirila gorge only one version is known to me (see ex. 7). The resemblance with Kartli *Tchona* is much more obvious here. The text is told almost completely by the middle voice, or as a solo over the drone, or accompanied by the upper voice doubling the drone. In the two-part sections we hear not only the middle voice, but we also meet a transitory textless solo of the upper voice. 3. The drone in this version, as well as in Kartli, uses only two step instead of the three, we find in the other Imereti *Tchona* versions.

The given examples are not enough for final conclusions. More material is needed for comparison. Tough archaism is typical for *Tchona* in both regions, Kartli and Imereti, obviously they stopped their evolution on the stage of transition from two-part to three-part-singing.

### III

The musical archaism reveals itself even more when comparing *Tchona* with the Christmas song *Alilo*. A direct comparison of *Tchona* and *Alilo* is possible in Imereti only, because in Kartli *Alilo* does not exist.

As for the musical means, the Imereti *Alilo* is much richer. The bass includes more than the three steps in *Tchona*, which allows more modulations. We meet two kinds of cadenzas. In one of them the bass rises to a fourth or fifth to enter in unison with the other voices. In the second one the upper voice forms a fifth together with the lower voices. In Imereti *Tchona* we meet only the second, simpler form. As for the *Alilo* often both of them stand side by side, the simple one as an inner cadenza, the unison one at the end, which is mostly typical for canticles. It seems that some possible musical changes have not touched *Tchona*.

The texts acknowledge that the Christian adaptation of *Alilo* went further than that of *Tchona*. Hints on the contents of the holiday like "on the 25th of December Jesus was born in Bethlehem" (*Alilo* recorded in Tolebi, Samtredia region, by Edisher Garaqanidse, unpublished manuscript) are not observed in *Tchona*. Here, the holiday is only mentioned. The leading factor is blessing and asking for presents, whereas in *Alilo* we find only allusions about presents, as: "Blessing to the annunciator". Though in the spoken congratulation preceding the song is said "Lent for regret, Easter for joy" (K 1, 3, 4, 13, 14), the call *oroloba*, which often is inserted in the song reminds more a magic formula of redoubling and increase, then a prayer. Strange seem during the Holy Week at least joking hints as "Oh, what a beautiful girl. Hey, boy, come and dance here!", which in one of the most ancient recordings (K 13) a singer pronounces before the song ends, with the spring ritual *Tchona* they go well.

If *Tchona* is spread within a considerably small area because of its oblivion, this could be explained by the less adaptation for Christianity. But this does not explain the existence of *Tchona* in a compact, central area of Georgia, neither the fact that in Kartli, where *Tchona* is the most spread, *Alilo* is unknown. An exploration of such areas needs inter-disciplinary investigation, where other ethnographic facts, dialects and historical events are studied simultaneously with rituals and songs. Mrs. Nino Ghambashidze offers us an interesting historical hypothesis about this area in her paper.

In the end I must admit that *Tchona* is not the only Easter respectively spring-custom song in Georgia. In Upper Imereti, Ratcha an Lechkhumi the round dance song *Kriste aghsdga* (Christ is arisen) was performed on Easter Sunday going from home-to-home (Araqishvili 1915: 25). In the South-West of Imereti the round dance *Krialeso* (with a

meaningless text) is connected with Easter. Possibly we can deal with the same occurrence in Samegrelo and Guria, though because of the lack of a text pointing to the ritual its identification might be difficult. Thus, we hope, that on the bases of further thorough investigation, there will be left fewer and fewer “white blots” on Georgia’s calendar custom map.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The here mentioned ritual *Dedopaloba* was performed by children, who used to carry a doll (*dedopala*) (Japaridse 1896: 118). Its text resembles the one of *Lazare*.

<sup>2</sup> I have found one exception: in the version of M. Kavsadses choir (K 13) the couplets are followed by a wide Coda, on the upper drone step, which in its turn ends on the upper – i. e. third – step.

Translated by MANANA BAKRADSE

### *Tchona*: recordings and transcriptions

#### *Kartli*

- K 1 *Tchona Arkhisi (Gori region) 1918*, recorded and noted by G. D. Svanidse (Scientific-methodical centre of folk art, Tbilissi, <sup>1</sup> 1883)
- K 2 *Tchona Kekhijvari (Kareli region) 1956* recorded by K. Rosebashvili (Scientific-methodical centre of folk art, Tbilissi, <sup>1</sup> 13/147)
- K 2a *Tchona* Vano Mtchedlishvili (1989: <sup>1</sup> 12), recorded between 1930 - 1940
- K 3 *Tchona* recorded and noted by G. Germanashvili (Scientific-methodical centre of folk art, Tbilissi <sup>1</sup> 13/50; 1899)
- K 4 *Tchona* Ensemble „Mtiebi“ 1996: <sup>1</sup> 20
- K 5 *Tchona Kvemotchala (Kaspi region)* (Rosebashvili 1981: 76 <sup>1</sup> 48)
- K 6 *Tchona Kvemotchala (Kaspi region)* 1967 (Grimaud 1989: <sup>1</sup> 21)
- K 7 *Tchona* Choir directed by Maro Tarkhnishvili (1988: side 1, <sup>1</sup> 5), recorded between 1930 - 1950
- K 8 *Tchona Khovle (Kaspi region) 1901* (Arakchiev 1916, 88 <sup>1</sup> 13)
- K 9 *Tchona Khvedureti (Kareli region) 1901* (Arakchiev 1916, 81 <sup>1</sup> 13)
- K 10 *Tchona Samtavisi (Kaspi region) 1901* (Arakchiev 1916, 60 <sup>1</sup> 11)
- K 11 *Tchona Aranisi (Aragvi gorge) 1908* (Arakchiev 1916, 104 <sup>1</sup> 15)
- K 12 *Tchona* handed down by Davit Tchkuaseli recorded by M. Chirinashvili (Scientific-methodical centre of folk art, Tbilissi, <sup>1</sup> 13-72)
- K 13 *Tchona* Tbilissis Folk and Church Choir, directed by Mikheil Kavsadse 1914 (Linich 2001: <sup>1</sup> 16), noted by the author
- K 14 *Tchona Ertatsminda (Kaspi region) [1899]*, Kargareli 1899: 8, <sup>1</sup> 2

#### *Imereti*

- I 1 *Tchona Bazaleti, 5. VIII. 1954*, Devdariani sisters, recorded by Edisher Savicki, Phonothek of the Tbilissi Conservatoire <sup>1</sup> 28-10
- I 2 *Tchona Kitskhi* recorded and noted by Edisher Garaqanidse, unpublished manuscript
- I 3 *Tchona Kitskhi 28. 07. 2003*, Ensemble *Orera*, recorded and noted by the author.
- I 4 *Tchona Kharagauli 1954* recorded by Edisher Savicki, Phonothek of the Tbilissi Conservatoire <sup>1</sup> 27-9
- I 5 *Tchona Kharagauli 1954, 5. VIII.*, recorded by Edisher Savicki, Phonothek of the Tbilissi Conservatoire
- I 6 *Tchona Old singers group of Chkhiaruli, 20. 9. 1959*, recorded and noted by Givi Tkheldse (Scientific-methodical centre of folk art, Tbilissi, <sup>1</sup> 3939)

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მაგალითი 3. ჭონა, ჩან. კასპის რ-ნის სოფ. სამთავისში 1901 წ. დ. არაყიშვილის მიერ (ქ10), დასაწყისი

EXAMPLE 3. Tchona, recorded 1901 in Samtvisi (Kaspi region) by D. Araqishvili (K10), beginning

Andante Adagio accel. a tempo

ჭო-ნა სას-ლო ჭო-ნა

ჭო-ნა ნა ჭო-ნა

rit. a tempo

მაგალითი 4. ჭონა, ასრულებს გუნდი მ. კავსაძის ხელმძღვანელობით, 1914 წ. (ქ13), დასაწყისი

EXAMPLE 4. Tchona, Choir directed by M. Kavsadze 1914 (K13), beginning

ღმერთმა, ააშენოს ეს ოჯახი!

გაისამავამ დროსა, მოგვარე სიხარულისა მუდამ. მარხვა სინანულისა – აღდგომა სიხარულისა მოახსენეთ ბუღბუღებო!

$\text{♩} = 100$  accel.

ჭო-ნა ჭონას ვოყავ, ჭო-ნა ვნახე სარგებელი ფრა ვნახე ჭონას ვოყავ, ჭო-ნა ვნახე

rit. შეი

სარგებელი ფრა ვნახე შეი შეი და აღლოთასა, მალოთასა სული ჩამკვე ქა-ლა-თასა.

acc. შეი rit.

შეი აღლოთასა, მალოთასა სული ჩამკვე ქალოთასა შეი შე-და გოგოვ, ერთი კვრცხი ჩადე.

მაგალითი 5. იმერული ჭონა, ასრულებს ხარაგაულის რ-ნის სოფ. კიცხის ანს. „ორერა“ 2003 წ.  
(ი3)

EXAMPLE 5. Tchona, (I3), recorded 2003 in Kitskhi (Kharagauli region) by the author

♩ 45 - 76

ო ი ა ი ა  
მო-გილოცავ დღესას-წაულს ო ი ა ი ა აღდგომას და

აღდგომას და ა-ხაა- კვირა - სა ო ა ო მთა-ში უ-რე - მი აე-ტა-რე

♯ Coda  
ა - ი აე - ა - რი - ო ა - ი ა - ჯა მში - ღო - ბა

მაგალითი 6. ჭონა, ჩან. ხარაგაულის რ-ნის სოფ. კიცხში ე. გარაყანიძის მიერ (ი2), ნაწილი  
EXAMPLE 6. Tchona, recorded in Kitskhi (Kharagauli region) by Edisher Garaqanidze (I2), fragment

ჭონას ვი - ყავ, ჭონას ვიყავ, ჭონა ვნახე ა ა სარ-გე-ბელი

ვე-რა ვნა- ხე ა ა ე სარ-გე-ბე- ლი სარ-გე-ბე ლი ვე-რა ვნახე

