

THE POSSIBILITY OF INTERPRETING ANCIENT GEORGIAN CHANTS THROUGH 19TH CENTURY TRANSCRIPTIONS

Deciphering the 10th century Georgian chanting signs (neumes) remains an unsolved problem. In this paper I compare the common chants of the two 10th century written monuments: Mikael Modrekili's "Tropologion" (Gvakharia, 1989), and "The Heirmoses and Chants of the Holy Virgin" (Kiknadze, 1982). These allow comparison of common chants and collation with their analogues (attested in 19th century transcriptions). These can be used to draw reliable conclusions, which in my opinion, will interest those concerned with the problem.

Terminology

While Mikael Modrekili's name is known very well today, this cannot be said about the authors of "The Heirmoses and Chants of the Holy Virgin". This monument has two authors: Iordane and Ivane. Let us give the name "parallel stanzas" to the two versions of any stanza of the same chant (according to both Mikael Modrekili, and Iordane and Ivane). A pair of parallel stanzas may be called an "incident". I am going to present some examples in the following form:

ყრმათა ღვთისმსახურთა (*Qmata ghtismsakhurta* – 'the young devout')
(st. 2)

არა მსახურეს ხატსა ოქროსასა (*Ara msakhures khatsa okrosasa* – 'those who do not serve the golden icon') (Gvakharia, 1989:40)

არა მსახურეს ხატსა ოქროსასა (*Ara msakhures khatsa okrosasa* – 'those who do not serve the golden icon') (Kiknadze, 1982:774)

Explanation: first of all I refer to the title of the chant. "(st.2)" put in brackets next to the title indicates the number of the stanza. It is followed by the text of the stanza, with the neumes - first according to Modrekili, and then according to Iordane and Ivane. Each syllable devoid of any kind of chanting signs may be called a free syllable. Any succession of chanting signs can be called a figure. For instance is a figure.

Classification of Incidents

As a result of collating parallel stanzas the incidents were naturally divided into several categories. I will refer only to some of them and provide one example for each.

1. Category "identical"

რომელმან თავს იღვა ქირი (*Romelman tavs idva chiri* – 'those who got themselves into trouble') (st.2)

ქირი იგი ზღვისაი მის (*Chiri igi zghvisai mis* – 'this trouble from the sea')
(Gvakharia, 1989:5)

ქირი იგი ზღვისაი მის (*Chiri igi zghvisai mis* – 'this trouble from the sea')
(Kiknadze, 1982:176)

2. Category Momtsvelebi (containing, including);

უგალობდით ყოველნი რომელმან (*Ugalobdit qovelni romelman* – ‘all are chanting those’) (st.2)

რომელმან მწარისაგან (*Romelman mtsarisagan* – ‘those who from the bitter’) (Gvakharia, 1989:4)

რომელმან მწარისაგან (*Romelman mtsarisagan* – ‘those who from the bitter’) (Kiknadze, 1982:128)

3. Category Shemavseblebi (Complementaries):

ცუდ იქმნა (*Tsud ikmna* – ‘felt bad’) (st.1)

ცუდ იქმნა სიმხურვალე (*Tsud ikmna simkhurvalei* – ‘felt bad heat’) (Gvakharia, 1989:5)

ცუდ იქმნა სიმხურვალე (*Tsud ikmna simkhurvalei* – ‘felt bad heat’) (Kiknadze, 1982:176)

4. Category Tsanatsvlebulebi (Substituted)

შენდა აღვიმსთობთ (*Shenda aghvimstobt* – ‘your holiness’) (st.3)

განანათლე სული ჩემი (*Gananatle suli chemi* – ‘give blessing to my soul’) (Gvakharia, 1989:23)

განანათლე სული ჩემი (*Gananatle suli chemi* – ‘give blessing to my soul’) (Kiknadze, 1982:636)

I am not going to characterize other more complicated categories. I should only note that there are various combinations of the incidents mentioned above (see the example „ყრმათა ღვთისმსახურთა“ (*Qrmata ghvtsimsakhurta* – ‘the young devout’) (st.2)).

I could give many more examples for each category. It means that Mikael Modrekili and Iordane (or Ivane) mainly provide the same chants (stanzas) with neumes used in different ways. Now I would like to draw your attention to the category Tsanatsvlebulebi (substituted), which is of special interest to me.

Main Conclusion

The categories *Tsanatsvlebulebi* (substituted) and *Identurebi* (identical) are united by one common feature. Both include incidents where the parallel stanzas are provided with the same figure. The similarity of the figures clearly indicates a similarity in the melody.

How do the identicals differ from the substituted ones? Only in the position of the corresponding signs. The number and succession (or figure) of the signs in parallel stanzas are the same both with the identical and the substituted. Here are two more examples of “substituted” cases:

გულისწყრომასა მძლავრისასა (*Gulistsqromasa mdzlavrisasa* – ‘rage of the powerful’) (st.7)

გალობით იტყოდეს სახიობასა (*Galobit itqodes sakhiobasa* – ‘singing expressed with chanting’) (Gvakharia, 1989:7)

გალობით იტყოდეს სახიობასა (*Galobit itqodes sakhiobasa* – ‘singing expressed with chanting’) (Kiknadze, 1982:184)

ნათლისა მომცემელი (*Natlisa momtsemeli* – ‘he who gave us light’) (st.3)

შენ გიგალობთ ღამითგან აღმსთობილთა (*Shen givalob ghamitgan aghmstobilta* – ‘we chant for you...’) (Gvakharia, 1989:23)

შენ გიგალობთ ღამითგან აღმსთობილთა (*Shen givalob ghamitgan aghmstobilta* – ‘we chant for You...’) (Kiknadze, 1982:638)

The melody is determined by the figure and since both substituted and “identical” are provided with the same figures, the authors may have meant the same melody. The fact that in substituted the positions of the corresponding signs are different may be explained in the following way: the chanter had the right to distribute the text of the chant across the melody at his own discretion. I consider this to be the main conclusion and will use it quite often further on.

On the signs

The 10th-century chanting signs may be divided into two groups: those placed above and those placed below the syllable. There are five signs which can be very easily differentiated from the rest. Four are used above the syllable ჳა and 9. The fifth is put under the syllable: გ.

There is also a group of above-the-syllable signs oriented from right to left, and indented: 75. It is doubtful whether the number of indentations had any significance, because at a glance it is impossible to see exactly how many indentations a sign has (they have to be counted). But two groups are very easy to differentiate: the sparse and the dense. In my opinion it is this method of differentiation that should be applied to signs of this class.

The situation is exactly the same with indented, below-the-syllable signs oriented downward, from left to right. These are symmetrical with the ones mentioned above: 4. Here, too, the significant point is whether the indentations are dense or sparse.

Another group: below the syllable, slightly slanting straight lines, is oriented downward: 3. They too, like the ones mentioned above, must be divided into short and long ones. Thus, to summarize, there are 11 different signs.

In the electronic database I have collected about 140 chants. Each of them is in the form of both a manuscript transcription and a version supplied with neumes. In these chants the frequency of the occurrence of the above-mentioned signs varies. The percentage of their distribution is given in chart 1.

On the Free Passages (not containing neumes)

I have thoroughly studied 13 heirmoses. They consist of 85 stanzas provided with 343 signs. Conclusions about the meaning of these chanting signs will be made on the basis of this material, though before saying anything about the signs proper I should like to make a few remarks about the initial free syllables of the stanza. How were such passages to be sung? Let us assume that here some heterogeneous line is meant, then why are the signs absent? Can it be that the melody does not need any signs? I think that the free initial parts of the stanza must have been sung to some homogenous tune which did not need any signs. There can be only one melody like that: a succession of sounds with similar pitch and duration (reciting a text). The occurrence of one sound with a different pitch and duration will immediately call for the use of signs, but if all the sounds are similar there is no such need.

Of the 85 stanzas mentioned above, 18 begin with 'free' passages. With eight of them this fact is proved in the transcription analogues; e.g. საიდუმლო უცხო და დიდებული (Saidumlo utskho da didebuli – 'unknown and majestic secret') (st. 1).

საიდუმლო (Saidumlo – „Unknown“) (Gvakharia, 1989:74; Erkvanidze, 2002:70)



How can it be explained that in 10 out of 18 instances the presence of the free initial syllables is not attested in the transcription analogues? I can provide quite a few examples where one author begins the stanza with free syllables while the other puts a sign over the very first syllable *guliswyromasa mdzlavrisasa* (see „გულისწყრომასა მძლავრისასა“ (*Gulistsqromasa mdzlavrisasa* – 'rage of the powerful') (st.7)).

Proceeding from all that has been said above we may conclude the following. The chanter had the right to begin any stanza with one or several sounds of the same pitch and duration (recitation) and then start the melody. The chanter could also begin the melody from the very first syllable.

The Interpretation of Signs

The criterion used to determine the meanings of chanting signs follows from the main conclusion. It is the difference between the distribution of the text of the hymn against the melodies for the first voice as given in the transcription manuscript — and their analogues supplied with neumes. My views are summarized in Table 1.

First of all it should be noted that the signs given in the table refer only to the melody and say nothing about the key. Secondly, the hymns are transcribed in four durations: eighth, fourth, half, and whole. The whole note is the main rhythmic unit. It should also be noted that two signs, \curvearrowright and \curvearrowleft are not present in the table. The first is not there because it does not occur in hymn 13. The other sign has general functions. I have noticed two functions it performs: In one case it indicates the beginning of a melodic movement (in most cases after the psalmody). In other cases it shows where ascending should be replaced by descending, or vice versa.

Diagram 2 includes information about: how often the neumes occur in Heirmos 13 what is the real percent of their occurrence (as a result of the alternative redistribution of

the text); and the possible percentage of their occurrence (as a result of an insignificant variation).

ვერ შემძლებელ ვართ (*Ver shemdzebel vart* – 'we are unable') (st. 1) (Kiknadze, 1982:240; Erkvanidze, 2002:94)

ვერ შემძლებელ ვართ დიდ ბადაშენ და
ver she m zle be l vart di de bad shen da

Here is the modification of the stanza achieved by the redistribution of the syllables, which is in perfect accord with the neumes (see table 1):

ვერ შემძლებელ ვართ დიდ ბადაშენ და
ver shem zle bel vart di de bad shen da

ყრმათა ღვთისმსახურთა (*Qmata ghtivismsakhurta* – 'the young devout') (st. 1) (Gvakharia, 1989:40; Kereselidze: 705)

ყრმათა ღვთისმსახურთა ბაბილონშია
qрма ta gvtis msa khur ta ba bi lons shi na

After the modification:

ყრმათა ღვთისმსახურთა ბაბილონშია
qрма ta gvtis msa khur ta ba bi lons shi na

წინასაუკუნეთა (*Tsinasaukuneta* – 'of past centuries') (st. 1) (Kiknadze, 1982:144; Karbelov, 1899:10)

წინასაუკუნეთა
tsi na sa u ku ne ta

After the modification:

წინასაუკუნეთა
tsi na sa u ku ne ta

ღმერთო მოხედენ (*Ghmerto mokhedden* – god grant thy mercy) (st. 6) (Kiknadze, 1982:144; Shugliashvili, 2002:52)

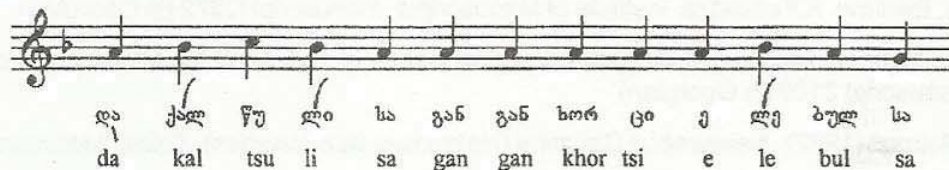


After the modification:

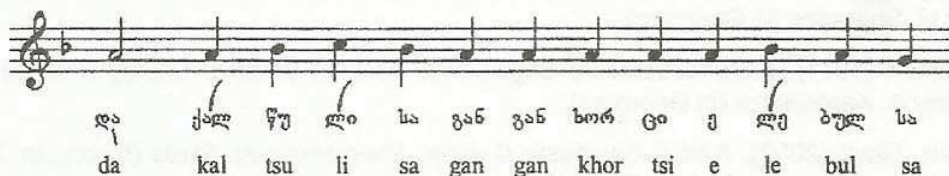


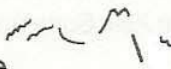
Here is another example where the sign / is used in its second function:

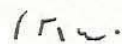
წინასაუკუნეთა (*Tsinasaukuneta* - of past centuries') (st. 3) (Kiknadze, 1982:144; Karbelov, 1899:10)



After the modification:



From diagram 2 it is clear that the signs  do not occur very often. Hence, the percentage of their use is not reliable.

On the other hand, the following four occur very frequently: .

Accordingly the percentage of their use can be relied upon. However, many more examples should be looked at before it can be said with certainty that Table I reflects 10th-century use. So far, I can only say: the high percentage of occurrence of these signs in the notation analogues is a serious pointer to this interpretation, pending a fuller study.

Conclusion

The ancient Georgian neumes are reference symbols, which perform a variety of functions. With the help of these signs, Georgian chanters in antiquity found it easy to perform hundreds of Heirmoses to canonical tunes.

Consider again the 10th-century Georgian chanters Mikael Modrekili, and Iordane and Ivane. They adhered strictly to the canonical melodies and never deviated from them. But they allowed themselves some freedom by:

- a) Distributing the text on the melody according to their own discretion;







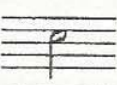


b) Preceding the stanza of the hymn by the psalmody (or a recitative on a constant pitch). Presumed meanings of the neumes were determined on the basis of these findings. The high percentage of occurrences of almost all were attested in 19th-century transcription analogues. Also, the volume of material we possess (140 hymns) gives us a hope that when all the existing material has been studied thoroughly, the ancient Georgian chanting signs can finally be reliably interpreted.

Translated by LIANA GABECHAVA

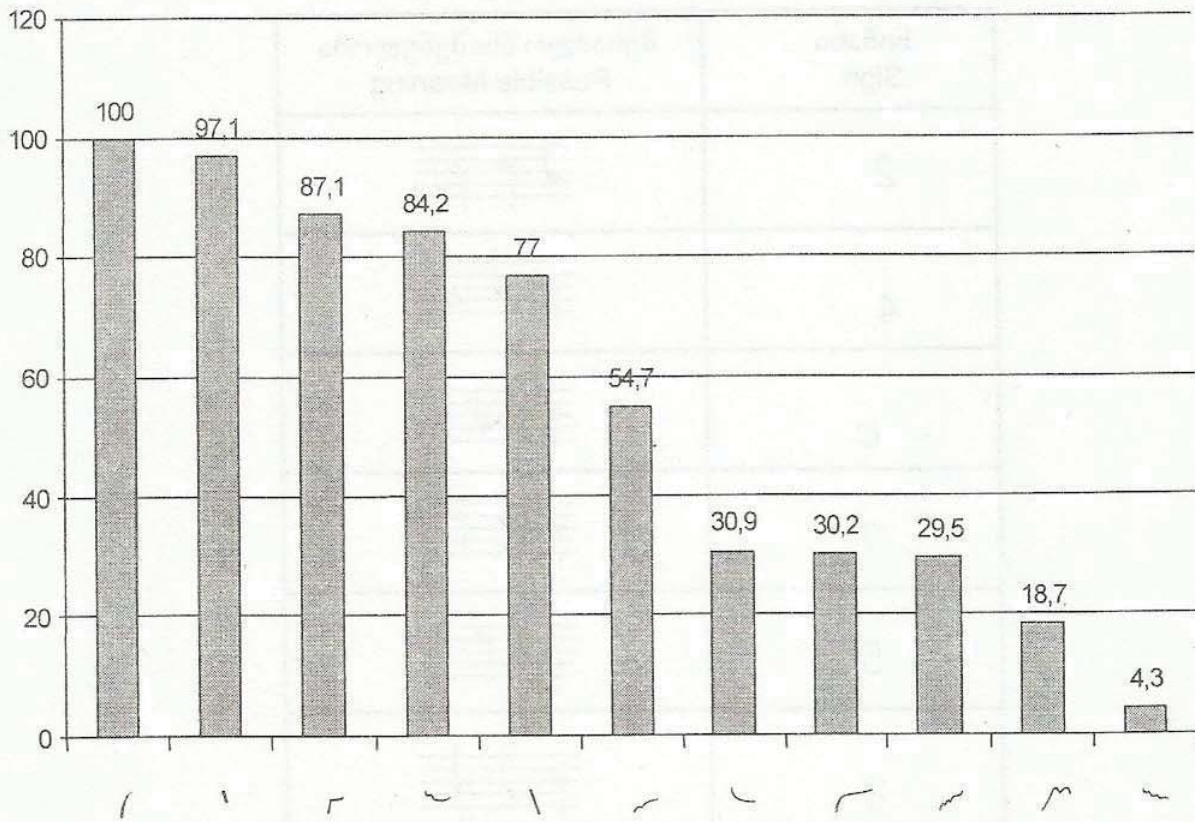
References

- Erkvanidze, Malkhaz (2002). *Kartuli Saeklesio Galoba* (Georgian Sacred Music), vol.2, Tbilisi: Church Singing Centre at the Georgian Patriarchate (in Georgian)
- Gvakharia, Vazha (1989). *Mikael Modrekilis Himnebi* (Mikael Modrekili's Hymns), Tbilisi: *Sabchota Sakartvelo* (in Georgian)
- Karbelov, P. and Molodinov, A. (1899). *Sagalobelni Shobis Dghesastsaulisa* (Christmas Chants). Tbilisi: Typography M. Sharadze and Friends (in Georgian)
- Kereselidze, Ekvtime. K.Kekelidze. Institute of Manuscripts, manuscript Q672 (in Georgian)
- Khundadze, Razhden. Archives of the Methodological Center of Folk Art at the Ministry of Culture of Georgia, manuscript 2100 (in Georgian)
- Kiknadze, Gulnazi (1982). *Nevmirebuli Dzlispimi* (Heirmoses with Neumes), Tbilisi: *Metsniereba* (in Georgian)
- Koridze, Pilimon (1901). *Sagalobelni Pirveli Shetsirulisa, Vasil Didisa, Mghvdilis Kurtkhevisa da Kortsinebisa* (Chants of the First Martyr, Basil the Great, Ordaining a Priest and of Wedding). Tbilisi: Typography M. Sharadze (in Georgian)
- Koridse, Pilimon (1911). *Sadghesastsaulo Sagalobelni Tsirvisa* (Festive Liturgy Chants). Tbilisi: Typography A. Kereselidze (in Georgian)
- Shugliashvili, Davit (2002). *Kartuli Saeklesio Galoba, Shemoktmedis Skola* (Georgian Sacred Music, Shemokmedi Chanting School). Tbilisi: Church Singing Centre at the Georgian Patriarchate, the International Centre for Georgian Folk Song (in Georgian)

ცხრილი 1.
 TABLE 1.

ნიშანი Sign	შესაძლო მნიშვნელობა Possible Meaning
2	
4	
c	
7	
5	
8	
3	
b	
a	

ბრაზიკი 1. ნიშნების პროცენტულობა საგალობლებში (n=138)
DIAGRAM 1. Percentage of signs in hymns (n=138)



ბრაზიკი 2. სამგალობლო ნიშნების რეალური და შესაძლო დადასტურების პროცენტულობა 13 განხილული ძლისპირის მიხედვით

DIAGRAM 2. Percentages of actual and possible occurrences of signs in 13 considered heirmoses

