

ON A TRADITION OF THE EAST GEORGIAN CHANTS

For more than fifteen years we have been witnessing the most significant process of the revival of Georgian chanting and its inculcation in divine service. The diversity of the Georgian religious chanting still remains a prolific area of scholarly research and practical study. It is natural that all the specimens of Georgian chanting that have survived to this day are the object of increased interest. This concerns collections containing both neumes and contemporary transcriptions.

It is common knowledge that the great majority of recordings in contemporary transcription come from the western (West Georgian) chanting school branch (e.g. Gelati school, Shemokmedi school and others). Therefore the chanting traditions of these schools have already become the subject of the scholarly research. At the same time it is very important to study each specimen representing the chanting tradition of the East Georgian (so-called Kartli-Kakhetian) chanting school. There can be no doubt that the most important source of this tradition is the heritage of the Karbelashvili priests. The sources from the Karbelashvilis' collections have been repeatedly used by Georgian composers and choir-masters as the foundation for their own arrangements based on the East Georgian chanting tradition. The best known among them is the collection of chants by composer Zakaria Paliashvili: "Georgian (Kartli-Kakhetian) Religious Chants for the Mixed Choir". But the question is whether the Karbelashvilis' mode is the only original tradition of the Kartli-Kakhetian (East Georgian) chanting.

We can find the answer on this question through the analysis of the available recordings of Kartli-Kakhetian chanting and by comparing them with the *Karbelaant Kilo* (or the singing style of the Karbelashvili chanting school). Having this in mind we must first dwell upon Dimitri Araqishvili's work "On Georgian Sacred Music. With the Supplement of Melodies" (Araqishvili, 1905:77-118). The work includes a 14-page historical survey of Georgian sacred music and 36 hymns, phonographically recorded and transcribed by Araqishvili (supposedly in Tbilisi) himself. The hymns were performed by an "acclaimed expert in chanting" Giorgi Zalikashvili (singing *mtkmeli*, literally he who speaks, or the main performer), M. Omanidze (a priest, singing bass) and the deacon of Kaloubani church N. Kuchaidze (the performer of *modzakhili*, literally he who follows, or the accompanying voice).

Before discussing the modern notation system used to transcribe the hymns let us discuss the short preface, titled "On putting the Georgian hymns from phonograms into notation system". In his preface Araqishvili remarks, that "the difficulty in putting recorded hymns in modern transcription was the same he had come across while recording secular songs. This difficulty was mainly caused by the scale system of the chants which is different from the tempered scale system of a piano, as well as by specific folk rhythms based on some own intrinsic laws" (Araqishvili, 1905:93).

Araqishvili discusses the problem of the scale system of Georgian chanting in his "Short Survey of Georgian Music" (1925). He writes: "Despite the fact that a great number of our chanting cadences look similar to the European ones there is still no doubt that the scale system of our hymns are of a folklore nature and it is created by the Georgian people. It is not connected either to the Ambrosian or the Gregorian traditions and certainly has nothing to do with the major-minor system" (Araqishvili 1925:29).

The problem of the Georgian scale system was of a great significance for Araqishvili. The proof of it is the great number of footnotes indicating a slight rise or fall of certain sounds. According to Araqishvili: "The scale of hymns sometimes put us in a situation that we did not know what to do" (Araqishvili 1905:93). This problem is certainly very familiar to those who had to do with putting a Georgian hymn or Georgian folk song down in a tempered notation.

"The great majority of our chants are based on a natural scale opposed to a tempered one (the piano scale system)," writes Araqishvili "Therefore, there are no means to transcribe them with great precision" (Araqishvili, 1905:91). "In regards of the rhythm, when one note's length was a quarter note plus a one-sixteenth note, or a half note reduced by a one-sixteenth note, or a half note plus a sixteenth note plus a thirty-second note or still another combination, we had to unify them according to the bars. The bar line and rhythmic groupings were registered in order to depict the natural movement of a melodic line, though we should remark that the length of the notes are not always absolutely accurate" (Araqishvili, 1905:93).

Despite these difficulties, we can see that Araqishvili had a very scrupulous approach in putting the recorded chants down in musical notation. Another vivid example of his scrupulous approach is that he indicated the natural stops during singing at the moments when the performers were taking the breath (marked by *v*).

The chants transcribed by Araqishvili have another additional trait: they contain an ample variety of grace notes, which very rarely occur in the Karbelashvilis' transcriptions. It is particularly interesting that among Araqishvili's recordings there are three chants recorded from Vasil and Polievktos Karbelashvili. They are "Oh, Holy Lord" (#17), "To Thy Cross" (#18) and "Lord, Have Mercy on Us" (#6).

Araqishvili remarks "It is impossible not to notice, even at a glance, the differences between the Karbelashvilis' and our singing styles regarding harmony and more precise rhythm, as well as the most skilful *modzakhili* part (accompanying voice) and a smaller number of grace notes in the Karbelashvilis' versions" (Araqishvili, 1905:101).

Despite Araqishvili's statement, the number and variety of grace notes occurring in Araqishvili's transcriptions of Karbelashvili's chants are absent in the transcriptions of *Karbelaant Kilo* (songbook transcribed by the Karbelashvilis). Proceeding from this, it is difficult to believe that the Karbelashvilis offered Araqishvili different versions of their own performance, the versions which they did not transcribe for their own collection of chants. On the other hand, the Karbelashvilis could have believed it was unnecessary to register all the grace notes while transcribing chants for their own collections. The use of grace notes could have been left to the chanters' discretion. This supposition is supported by the well-known difficulty of transcribing grace notes in musical notation, let alone the difficulty of precision of such transcriptions. That's why Araqishvili adds a remark: "Of course, these grace notes are not performed in the European manner but quite specifically".

These grace notes could be naturally linked to the grace notes of Kakhetian (East Georgian) traditional songs, the region the Karbelashvilis were from; but how were the grace notes performed in chants? Araqishvili's recordings could give the best answer to this question, but as they are not available, we could resort to a unique recording made by a Georgian ethnomusicologist Kakhi Rosebashvili in the 1960s in Tbilisi (preserved in his personal archive). The recording represents Kartli-Kakhetian chants performed by still surviving old chanters of the Kashveti church. This recording itself represents an interesting subject for a study, but in our case it is interesting to compare

this unique recording of authentic performances of Kartli-Kakheti chants with the transcriptions made by the Karbelashvili brothers and Araqishvili.

For the comparison let us dwell on the liturgical chant "We Glorify Thee". First of all let us present the first two stanzas from Araqishvili's transcription (ex. 1; Araqishvili, 1905:113).

As we can see grace notes (thirty-second notes) occur quite frequently in the chant. The grace notes are given in the first part (*mtkmeli*) of this transcription. Interestingly, Araqishvili mentions the performer of the first part - Giorgi Zalikashvili - as the "rare expert of chanting". On the whole the texture of the chant is simple and modest. With the exception of grace notes, if we follow the melodic development it is evident that the chant mostly consists of the parallel movements of three parts. In this recording the second part (*modzakhili*) seems noticeably simple in comparison with the same voice recorded by the Karbelashvilis.

Before we start discussing Karbelashvili's transcriptions, we should note that all three examples selected for our comparison (from Araqishvili's and the Karbelashvilis' transcriptions (Karbelashvili, 1899:29) and from the 1960s recordings) are the first parts of the three-part chants. All three versions have the same melodic axis (see the ex. 2, 3, 4, all the same first two stanzas). To illustrate this fact the similar sounds from the three versions are marked with numbers. It is worth noting that almost all of these similar sounds are performed on the verbal syllables. The text is also evenly distributed in all the three versions.

It can be seen at a glance that among these versions the Karbelashvilis' version looks simpler than that of Araqishvili, though the melodic development of voices, the decorated movement of the accompanying voice (*modzakhili*) and the richness of polyphony indicates a more developed level of the Karbelashvilis' version.

And yet, does the recording represent the characteristic peculiarities of Karbelashvilis' chanting with precision? Were grace notes ignored while putting the chants in musical notation, or did this traditional dynasty of chanters, who preserved and maintained the *Kartli-Kakhuri Kilo* (Kartli-Kakhetian mode), chant without grace notes? As mentioned above, unfortunately we do not possess any audio recordings of either the Karbelashvilis or any other contemporary performers of the Kartli-Kakhetian chanting style. Therefore the recordings made by Kakhi Rosebashvili of the chanters of the Kashveti choir are of a great value.

The first thing one observes when listening to the recordings is on the one hand the abundance of grace notes and on the other hand a free metro-rhythmic organisation. Says Araqishvili: "An extremely wide-spread and free rhythm being the marker of ancient chanting creates great difficulty for the collector and researcher. Taking all this into account a special method needs to be worked out to record the melody with precision and without much trouble". I myself experienced the truth of Araqishvili's words while deciphering the audio recordings of the Kashveti chanters. The abundance of grace notes put down in musical notation makes the Kashveti version resemble the version of Araqishvili. Though, my colleagues will agree that even in the case of performing the musical notation with great accordance it is yet impossible to perform precisely the musical ornaments so abundantly occurring in the Kashveti chanters' performance. These grace notes need to be more intuitively performed like the grace notes of the long Kakhetian songs.

Performing the Kartli-Kakhetian chants with grace notes is not an invention of the 1960s; Araqishvili's recordings are the proof of it. The same recordings tell us that this

manner of performing was not alien to the Karbelashvilis either. It is obvious that all three examples presented in my paper belong to the same chanting tradition. Therefore the similarity of the performing tradition in them is not surprising.

The difference between them can also be observed in the texture as well as harmonic elements. In Araqishvili's transcriptions the tradition of using an additional vowel sound in the verbal text can be observed. This phenomenon is absent in the Karbelashvilis' transcriptions. Out of 36 chants in Araqishvili's collection, 21 begin with a fourth-fifth consonance (c-f-g), which is also alien to the Karbelashvilis' transcriptions. A similar beginning does not occur in the Kashveti chanters' performance as well, whereas it is a very usual phenomenon for the Western Georgian chanting schools (especially for the Shemokmedi School).

In the light of all the facts mentioned above it should be specially emphasized that Araqishvili's collection of chants as well as each specimen of the Kartli-Kakhetian mode in our possession must be thoroughly studied and analysed. Only after this we will have a more complete idea of the east Georgian chanting tradition of the diversified and mysterious world of Georgian chanting, represented until recently only by the collection of east Georgian chants transcribed by the Karbelashvili brothers.

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მაგალითი 1. დ. არაყიშვილი, შენ გიგალობთ
 EXAMPLE 1. D. Araqishvili, We Glorifi Thee

Molto adagio Moderato Adagio

შე - ი - ენ გი - გა - ლობთ
 še - i - en gi - ga - lobt

Tempo I

ი - ო - ო,
 i - o - o,

შე - ი - ენ გა - კურთ - ხებთ
 še - i - en ga - kurt - xebt

ე - ე - ე
 e - e - e

მაგალითი 2. დ. არაყიშვილი, შენ გიგალობთ
 EXAMPLE 2. D. Araqishvili, We Glorifi Thee

1 2 3 4 5 6
 შე - ი - ენ გი - გა - ლობთ
 še - i - en gi - ga - lobt

7 8 9 10
 ო - ო,
 o - o,

1 2 3 4 5 6
 შე - ი - ენ გა - კურთ ხებთ
 še - i - en ga - kurt xebt

7 8 9 10
 ე - ი - ე - ე
 e - i - e - e

მაგალითი 3. კარბელაშვილები, შენ გიგალობთ
 EXAMPLE 3. Karbelashvili, We Glorifi Thee

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 შე - ნ გი - გა - ლო - ბთ,
 še - n gi - ga - lo - bt,

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 შე - ნ გა - კუ - რთხე - ბთ
 še - n ga - ku - rtxe - bt

მაგალითი 4. ქაშვეთის მგალობლები, შენ გიგალობთ
 EXAMPLE 4. Kashveti Church Singers, We Glorifi Thee

1 2 3 4 5 6
 შენ გი - გა - ლობთ, ო
 šen gi - ga - lobt, o

7 8 9 10
 (Instrumental/Chorus)

1 2 3 4 5 6
 შენ გა - კურ - თხებთ
 šen ga - kur - txebt

7 8 9 10
 ე - ე
 e - e