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(GEORGIA)

ST. STEPANE THE CONFESSOR (KARBELASHVILI)
ABOUT GEORGIAN CHANTING
(BASED ON VASIL KARBELASHVILI'S PERSONAL LETTERS)

Vasil Karbelashvili¹ – later St. Stepane the Confessor², is an outstanding figure of the 2nd half of the 19th century and the 1st half of the 20th century. He is one of the prominent representatives of the renowned Karbelashvili family. Together with his siblings Vasil is a devoted defender of and active fighter for Georgian spiritual and material culture. His spheres of activity encompass many branches of secular and religious life. In his personal correspondence and newspaper publications, he intensively and boldly expressed his opinion on the polyphonic nature of Georgian chanting, performance, teaching and dissemination of chanting, transcription into notation system and its current state. Basing on his personal archive, the paper discusses the problems of Georgian chanting in the 19th -20th centuries.

Vasil Karbelashvili's Personal Archive

Vasil Karbelashvili's personal archive is preserved at K. Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts. A certain part of the archive (handwritten notated hymns, personal letters, documents) is known to church musicologists. We got familiarized and studied Karbelashvili's personal archive at NCM³. Among them, we focused on the handwritten documents related to musical culture.

Karbelashvili's archive contains the following types of handwritten documents:

- sheet music of songs and hymns;
- neumated texts of hymns copied from the neumated manuscripts of different centuries (S-425, Pitareti collection of hirmi, etc);
- sermons (black and white copies);
- report cards;
- material for newspaper publications (*Tsiskari*, *Droeba*, *Iveria*, *Sakartvelo*, *Sakhalkho gazeti*, *Tsnobis purtseli*, and others);
- personal and public letters (personal correspondence with family members, the clergy – exarchs, Georgian bishops);
- correspondence with public figures – writers, poets, theological seminary lecturers, musicians, students.

¹ Vasil Karbelashvili was born in the village of Kvemochala, Kaspi district in 1858. He grew up together with 5 siblings – in the family of archpriest Grigol Karbelashvili. He passed away in 1936, was interred in the fence of Navtlughi St. Barbare Church, Tbilisi. In 2011, the Holy Synod of the Georgian Church canonized five Karbelashvili brothers, including Vasil. Vasil was named St. Confessor Bishop Stepane.

² Archpriest Vasil was ordained as a monk in 1925, named Stepane he was consecrated as the bishop of Bodbe. From 1928 he was appointed Bishop of Alaverdi (Andghuladze, 2006:40)

³ NCM – National Centre of Manuscripts. Vasil Karbelashvili's personal archive contains over 600 documents

Researchers of Church Music are Familiar with the Music Collections

prepared and published as a result of Karbelashvili brothers' joint work. These are: "Vespers" (1897)⁴ and "Matins" (1898)⁵, "The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom",⁶

P. Karbelashvili's "Christmas Hymns" compiled by Pilimon Karbelashvili (1899)⁷, "Vespers" published by P. Karbelashvili (1907). The handwritten notated hymns⁸ left by the Karbelashvili brothers have been published, in edited form, in various hymn collections.⁹

In Karbelashvili family, the continuous tradition of singing-chanting dates back to the reign of King Erekle II, when Vasil's grandfather Petre Karbela was invited from Kartli to Kakheti as a teacher of chanting. Thus, what the Karbelashvili brothers included in their musical collections and manuscripts unites the church chanting common in Kartli and Kakheti. In the letters most encountered is the definition "**Kartli-Kakhetian chanting in Karbelashvilis' mode**". "Among the followers of old chanting there are great Geronti and his apprentice Geronti Chilashvili, Petre Karbela, Grigol Karbela, second-rank chanters – Archimandrite Soprom, Archimandrite Bidzina, then Archimandrite Tarasi and others. Today, that old chanting mode is preserved in **Kartli-Kakhetian chanting 'Karbelaant Kilo'** (Karbelashvilis' mode), what will be proved by time and future generations!" (#104, p. 2). When V. Karbelashvili recalls old chanters, among them he mentions his grandfather and father

⁴ "**Kartli-Kakhetian Chanting in Karbelaant Kilo**", *part I. Vespers* /transcribed into notes and published by Priest Vasil Karbelov. Tbilisi, 1897 (Typography M. Sharadze and Co)

⁵ "**Kartli-Kakhetian Chanting**", *part II. Matins* [sheet music] =*Kartalino-Kakhetinskoe tserkovnoe-Gruzinskoe penie*; chast 2. Utrenya: in Karbelashvilis' Mode/transcribed into notes and published by Priest Vasil Karbelov. Tiflis, 1898 ("Tsnobis purtseli" typography)

⁶ *Georgian Chanting (Kartli-Kakhetian mode) Liturgy The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*/Transcribed into musical notation by Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov with the help of priests brothers Pol. and Vasil Karbelashvili; Al. Molodinashvili and Gr. Mghebrishvili; Introduction and specification-amendment with the original by priest Vasil Karbelashvili. Published with the assistance of Alexandre – now Bishop of Guria. Tbilisi: Typography M. Sharadze and Co, 1899

⁷ *Karbelashvili Pilimon (1899) "Christmas Hymns"* Transcribed by pr. P. Karbelov and pr. A. Molodinov, notebook A. Tbilisi: Typography M. Sharadze and Co

⁸ The manuscripts are preserved at of the National Centre of Manuscripts, National Archives of Georgia and Folklore State Centre of Georgia.

⁹ *Georgian Church Chanting. East-Georgian School, vol. III*, second edition. Vespers- Matins-Liturgy, transcribed by the Karbelashvili brothers and Andria Benashvili. Center for Church Chanting of the Patriarchate of All Georgia. Tbilisi 2008

Georgian Church Chanting. East-Georgian School, vol. VII. Chants for 12 Great and Immoveable Feasts, Lent and for the week of Pentecost, transcribe by the Karbelashvili brothers. Center for Church Chanting of the Patriarchate of All Georgia. Tbilisi 2014

Georgian Church Chanting. Svetitskhoveli School, Simple Mode. Transcribed by Vasil and Polievktos Karbelashvili, according to the manuscripts of Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov and Grigol Chkhikvadze. The Folklore State Centre of Georgia. Tbilisi, 2018

Georgian Church Chanting. Anthology, vol. II and III. East Georgian Tradition of Chanting – Hymns of St. John Chrysostom Liturgy (parts I and II). Tbilisi, 2018

Georgian Church Chanting. Anthology, vol. IV. East Georgian Tradition of Chanting – Hymns for the Liturgies of St. John Chrysostom, Basil of Caesarea, First sacrifice (Pope Gregory the Great), wedding and ordination (part III). Tbilisi, 2018

Georgian Church Chanting. Anthology, vol. IX and XI. East Georgian Tradition of Chanting – Hymns for overnight liturgy (parts I and II). Tbilisi, 2019

– Petre¹⁰ and Grigol¹¹ Karbela, the successor of whose tradition he himself was.

When discussing the nature and performance of Georgian hymns, we rely on the references preserved in old liturgical collections, Georgian hymnographers and great chanters. The written and audio recordings they left behind are of great help to researchers and performers of church chanting. Vasil Karbelashvili's archive includes a number of documents containing similar information. The manuscripts in the personal archive also hold musical terms. The issue of musical terms is one of the most controversial and important in Georgian musicology. Thus, the application of this or that term by old singers in different contexts clarifies and explains the content of the term in its narrow and broad sense.

In V. Karbelashvili's personal archive we often come across the phrase "the rule of Georgian chanting", which refers to different content. The rule of Georgian chanting implies observance of the mode accuracy in chanting, synchronous utterance of words and tunes, correct articulation of the verbal text, and not transferring accents, made by imitating a foreign language (Russian, in this case), into Georgian, which was often difficult due to the language differences among the choir members.

Vasil often issued critical publications regarding the performance quality of choirs or transferring hymns to musical notation. He was distinguished by the same integrity and courage in relation to both high hierarchs, and people and names known to the public. Here is a quote from Vasil's letter: "I must tell you that I am very worried that you deliberately distort Kartli-Kakhetian chanting and reject the rule of Georgian chanting, developed over the centuries. I consider their transformation and distortion a great, unforgivable sin; I cannot help but ask you why do you do this? This is not purchasing or giving an estate away. How can we explain this inappropriate stopping from time to time and displacement of voice from syllable to syllable?" (V. Karbelashvili, #362). He sent this critical letter to composer Zakaria Paliashvili, who was the teacher of chanting to a female-male choir at the school for nobility. In several cases, the violation of the rule of Georgian singing manifested itself in the alteration of its performance style. Namely, as an example he gives a number of facts observed in the chanting of Kashueti Church choir, which were inappropriate for the performance of Georgian hymns: the choir started the hymn "Romelni kerubimta" in three voices and in the following stanzas the fourth voice joined in; In addition, during chanting the number of chanters increased to 50. "What does this mean? This means that in the beginning they want to draw the listener's ear to the fact that this is Georgian chanting; but then four-part chanting begins!!! God bless their chanting, but they do not follow the rule of Georgian chanting; the style of Georgian chanting is completely distorted" (V. Karbelashvili, #142).

By revising the opinions about Georgian chanting in the personal archive, we can also speak what is not characteristic to it. These are: a break in an inappropriate place, interruption of the idea, transfer of voice rotation from syllable to syllable, guttural sounds, beginning of a hymn in a high tone, voice strain, predominance of one voice over another. "Loud or haste chanting was highly reprehensible and shameful; laughing, whispering during chanting was strictly prohibited" (V. Karbelashvili, #260. 1935:3).

¹⁰ Petre Karbela (Khmaldze), born in 1754, mastered art of chanting in his childhood. He served at the court of King Erekle II. Later, Petre Khmaldze, aka Petre Karbela, was a choirmaster at Samtavisi Cathedral. Petre Karbelashvili's son Grigol was his father's student in chanting.

¹¹ Archpriest Grigol Karbelashvili was born in the village of Kvemochala, Shida Kartli, passed away in the same village in 1880.

Relation between Georgian Folk Song and Church Chanting

It is a well-known fact that the basis of church hymns are mode-harmonic or melodic patterns of many songs, including pagan ones. This issue has been the subject of interest for many researchers, and the studies continue in this direction. There were incomparable experts of church chanting and singing in Karbelashvili family, they were also well versed in the specifics of folk song performance. Thus, common and distinguishing features of these two branches of traditional music can be found in Karbelashvili brothers' publications on church chanting.

In various types of documents, Vasil Karbelashvili repeatedly mentions common modal roots of Kartli-Kakhetian songs and church hymns. "The best stanzas of ancient songs are still the basis of the best hymns, such as "Shen gugalobt", "Ghirs ars da martal", "Romeli kerubinta" and others. Listening to which makes not only Georgians, but also foreigners experience some kind of complete satisfaction and excitement (V. Karbelashvili, #80). Despite the closeness of traditional singing and chanting, in his letter to D. Arakishvili in 1919, Vasil strictly separates singing and chanting." Georgian chanting is not singing, and singing is not chanting. It's been like this for centuries" (V. Karbelashvili, #119. 1919). Here we will refer to P. Karbelashvili's historical overview "Georgian Secular and Sacred Modes" published at the end of the 19th century, in which paragraphs 3 and 6 deal with the issue – old Georgian secular and sacred modes. P. Karbelashvili connects bloodless adoption of Christianity in Georgia in the first centuries with the adaptation of old pagan singing mode-models to new Christian hymns. Namely, since main idea of these prayers and supplications did not contradict Christian doctrine, the clergy acted with the modes of songs and chants of the idolatry period as follows: the words (text) of Christian hymns were adjusted to these modes, and old modes remained intact. What else did the Georgians want in this respect? The shrines on the heights were not destroyed with the adoption of Christianity, during the liturgy, they could still hear their ancestors' modes (Karbelashvili P. 1898:11). Over centuries, the musical language, scale and character of Georgian chants were carved so that, despite their initial common roots, Georgian traditional songs and chants developed in completely different ways, this is evidenced by the words given above and the path of professional development of church chanting.

Methods of Teaching Church Chanting

Throughout their lives the members of Karbelashvili family, father – Grigol, brothers – Pilimon,¹² Vasil and Polievktos,¹³ were teachers of chanting in many villages and cities of East Georgia. Church chanting was taught in parish schools, theological seminaries and gymnasiums. Teaching was based on the oral method, which they referred to as the so-called "old method overgrown with moss" or the "true method", which was juxtaposed by the so-called "rational method of teaching". Vasil describes how his father used to teach him chanting with the old method: "*This method of teaching existed in Georgia until 1889, after which they started using European notation system. The student would repeat the hymn once, twice, three times from the beginning to the end or a part of it. Then the listeners would repeat and mark rest, ascend and descent with short lines and commas above and below in the text of the hymn. This way, they passed on the signs to each other. This is how our father taught us, and since we had our ears trained, we would stare at him and learn by*

¹² Priest Pilimon Karbelashvili was born in the village of Kvemochala in 1831; where he passed away in 1879.

¹³ Archpriest Polievktos Karbelashvili was born in the village of Kvemochala in 1855; he passed away in Gurjaani in 1936

memory. If father repeated the hymn twice, we chanted it a third time, and it was not at all difficult for us to learn the hymn or chant it in the service” (V. Karbelashvili, #260). As for the so-called “Rational method” it implies learning hymns with the help of musical notation. Those who received musical education at the turn of the 19th -20th centuries were actively involved in the process of writing the hymns into musical notes and preparation of church choirs. But since they did not have a thorough knowledge of chanting and most of them did not stand on the roots of traditional music from childhood, they did not achieve the desired result. As it is clear from the publications of that period, they needed longer time to work with the choir and as it is clear from the evaluations, the choirs they prepared did not have the necessary repertoire for divine service. “Priest Vasil Karbelashvili was the teacher of chanting, who taught with old oral method, and thanks to whom the whole seminary chanted the stichera of II, IV, VI and VIII voices, from memory, at the general lesson for all classes held in the church. My students of the time will confirm this. This is the benefit we have from oral teaching, the “old method overgrown with moss”. Don’t you want to show us the chanting by a rationally installed musician?! Now can you show us chanting learned by rational method? You can’t show an example of that! “ (V. Karbelashvili, #131).

Vasil recalls the stories told by his father in 1874 about teaching chants: “how, during the teaching or after, little Grigol would climb on his back and they visited modern Lavras and monasteries one after another, where chanting and prayers poured from the church: he listened and made up for what he lacked in chanting and praying, and the knowledge needed for priests. In the same manner as his contemporary accomplished chanter-students and enthusiasts of chanting had learned from the beginning. An accomplished chanter would go to his former students, stay with them for one week or two, and repeat with them all he had taught them. Like a will he asked them to safeguard chanting and pass it on to their students. From time to time, a singer visited another singer, a student – another student; if the host had learned something new, he would teach it to the guest to pass it on to others. What or who could prevent them from learning this way and preserving the legacy of their ancestors?! ((#260. V. Karbelashvili’s Memoirs, p. 3. 12 May, 1935). Today, when we read these letters, it is difficult to believe in the phenomenal memory and skills possessed by the singers of the previous century. We, both researchers and practicing singers, should strive to memorize more melody-models; this will develop our memory and musical intuition. Centuries of experience show that this is within the scope of human creative abilities.

The stories from V. Karbelashvili’s personal archive create a clear picture of the reality in the field of church chanting in Georgia at the turn of the 19th -20th centuries. A number of issues in both sheet music and other types of manuscripts arouse the interest of a researcher, however in the paper we have limited ourselves to covering a few issues and compared the opinions on the same issue in letters from different periods. Studying the manuscripts enriches our knowledge of the history and theory of church chanting. The life and activity of Karbelashvili family representatives, their love and devotion to Georgian church chanting motivate and are exemplary for any singer or young scholar.

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