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**PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE TRADITIONAL MUSIC AROUND  
THE BLACK SEA COAST: FOCUSING ON GEORGIAN AND  
CIRCASSIAN RITUAL SONGS, INSTRUMENTS, AND POLYPHONY**

Comparative studies of the folk music of Georgian and the North Caucasian peoples had been conducted by outstanding Georgian musicologists, including M. Shilakadze. Recently, in Georgia, the traditional polyphony of the Circassians has been sung by *Didgori*, a folk ensemble of the younger generation, and interest in the traditional music of the North Caucasian peoples is also growing. Among the traditional music of the peoples of the North and South Caucasus, spread similar elements, such as drone polyphony, song genres, and musical instruments. British musicologist J Samson pointed out the similarities of folk music melodies between the Tusheti of northeastern Georgia and the neighboring Chechen, and he also noted harmonic similarities in the traditional polyphony of the northwestern Svaneti and neighboring Kabardino-Balkaria (Samson, 2017: 19-20). Samson suggested that the musical classification concept of “dialect” which is used in Georgian folk music studies may be spread beyond Georgia’s borders (Samson, 2017: 18]. More than ten years ago, I conducted my field expedition to the Tusheti region, where I found that the descending minor scale melodies of accordion *Garmoni*, as well as the funeral songs of Tushetian people, could be similar to the traditional music of the Vainakh people, including Kist people of Georgia. Therefore, with the help of Samson’s opinion, I tried to compare the musical cultures of the Circassians with Georgian neighboring groups, including the Mingrelian, Gurian, Adjarian, and Laz people, in order to clarify similarities in their musical cultures. J. Jordania points out that common elements, including forms of polyphony, folk instruments, and song genres, are widespread among the Caucasian peoples, transcending differences in language and religion (Jordania, 2010: 234).

**Cultural Similarities between Georgians and Circassians**

The Abkhaz-Adyghe language family, which includes the Circassian language, belongs to the same Caucasian language family with Georgian (Kartvelian) language, and with the Georgians and they have common elements. For example, in the grammar of Georgian and Circassian languages, the ergative case is found in specific constructions such as the past tense, where the subject ends with -M. The ejective consonants are also characteristic in Circassian and Georgian phonetics. In addition, the men’s wool coats with bullets, called *Chokha* among Georgians and *Tsyi* among Circassians, are similar. Songs in praise of St. Georgios and St. Elijah also remain among the Circassians, who were Orthodox Christian until the Crimean Khanate (15th-18th) influenced them to Islamize their religion. The worship of Elijah is linked to rain-making rituals, which are in common Georgia. Rain-making songs are important among Circassian people. They make puppets which called *Khantse-guash* and sing songs to pray for rain is well known (Naloev, 1980: 18). This is common with the Georgian rain-making puppet which is called *Gonja* and the ritual song of rain-making *Gonjaoba*. Smallpox cure songs were also once widespread among Circassian people (Naloev, 1980: 15). This song is a song of appeasement to the lord called *Ziuskhan*, who brings illness, and is the Georgian equivalent of *Batonebo* (It also means lords). In comparison with Georgians, many

tragic epic songs (*Ghybza*) remain among Circassian people. Among the Circassians, epic songs were especially important as a means of transmitting their history, who had no written language. The main theme of the Circassian heroic epic is the struggle to defend the homeland (*Adygha Khaku*), including the battles against the invaders from Dagestan, as well as the military campaign against the Crimean Khanate and the Russian Empire. The defense of the homeland is also an important theme in Georgian folk songs. Western Circassians living on the Black Sea coast have cultural similarities with populations in western Georgia, including Mingrelians, Gurians, and Adjarians. It is interesting to note the similarities between Western Georgians and Western Circassians in terms of musical genres, such as brilliant wedding songs. Among west Circassians, including Shapsugh and Chemirgoy peoples, a gorgeous song for a wedding, called «*Ci Paq*» (Ci means my and Paq is a girl's name) is well known, while in the Adjara, a similar wedding song called «*Khints-kala*» (girl's name), is also known to praise the beauty of the girl. In Samegrelo, although it does not mention the girl, a brilliant wedding song called «*Kuchkhi Bedineri*» (Happy Foot) is known. Gorgeous wedding song is also known among the Abkhazians. It is possible the gorgeous song for a wedding may be a genre, unique to the traditional music of the Black Sea coast.

#### **Differences between East and West in Circassian Polyphony**

According to A. Sokolova, one of the experts of Circassian of Circassian music, the musical form of the Circassians can be divided into East and West (Sokolova, 2006: 100). The Western Circassians include Abzakh, Bzhedugh, Shapsugh, and Chemirgoy peoples. They live in the Republic of Adyghea and Krasnodar province of the Russian Federation. Eastern Circassians include the Kabarday (Kabardians) and Besleney peoples. They live in the Republic of Karachay-Cherkessia and the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic in the Russian Federation. Furthermore, Circassians migrated to Turkey, during the regime of the Russian Empire and lived as a diaspora all over the world. However, Sokolova points out that Circassian polyphony does not show much stylistic difference between sub-ethnic groups, like in Georgia. On the other hand, Z. Guchev, a well-known performer of Circassian traditional music with Kabardian roots, points out that the style of the accompaniment part of Circassian polyphony, called *Zhyu*, differs between East and West. Examining old recordings and notations, I also agree that the Circassian polyphony can be divided into East and West. Drone polyphony more flourishes among Eastern Circassian. It is interesting to note that the Kabardians are neighboring Ossetians who also have a drone singing style. As well as Georgian and Ossetian, among the Circassians, polyphony, and drones are sung by collective. Many songs of Kabardians, such as the epics genres, are sung in drones with octaves or parallel fifths, as well as single tones. This is in contrast to Georgian polyphony, where drones are often sung in a monotone. In Circassian polyphony, accompaniment by voice without lyrics, like a drone or antiphon part, is called *Zhyu* (*Ezhu* in Kabardian). Shilakadze makes an interesting observation about the similarities between the vocal part *Zhyu* in Circassian polyphony and the collective vocal part *Bani* in Georgian polyphony (Shilakadze, 2010: 177]. Like the Georgian *Bani*, which is often sung by without lyrics, the Circassian *Zhyu* is also sung by without lyrics. Generally, in Georgian polyphony, the *Bani* is sung by a lower pitch than the part singing the lyrics. However, in Circassian polyphony, the *Zhyu* is not necessarily sung by a lower pitch than the lyric parts. Shilakadze, quoting I. Javahishvili's view, argues that in Georgian polyphony, *Bani* may in the past have simply meant accompaniment, rather than the lower register (Ibid.). In Georgia, orthodox chants have taken root since the Middle Ages. Therefore, it is possible, that the polyphony of Orthodox chants, as a result of stylization, may have

limited the *Bani* to a lower pitch and also influenced the range of *Bani* in secular polyphony. In the past in Georgia, accompanying voices, such as *Bani* may not have been limited to lower pitches. The Upper voice *Krimanchuli* of western Georgia, may be an example of the remnants of the role that accompaniment voice had in the past. The Orthodox chant tradition is not rooted among the Circassians. Therefore, it is possible that *Zhyu* has not lost the general role of accompaniment that the Georgian *Bani* possibly had. When referring to the differences in Circassian polyphony between the East and West, it is possible to say that Western Circassians prefer instrumental music rather than Eastern Circassians. In particular, the end-blown flute *Qamyl* and the fiddle-*Shichepshin* are very popular among the western Circassians. The clapper *Pkhatsich* is also necessary in Western Circassian music. The polyphony of the Western Circassians includes a soloist who sings the lyrics, a collective or single performer, who sings a part of *Zhyu*, and a player of musical instrument, such as *Shichepshin* or *Qamyl*. In some cases, the lyrics are sung by the performers of the *Shichepshin*, and the percussion-*Pkhatsich* performer sings a part of *Zhyu*. The melody of *Shichepshin* or *Qamyl* mainly follows the melody of the soloist, but occasionally follows the melody of *Zhyu*, creating a heterophonic sound. It is noted that the polyphony of the Abkhaz-Adyghe people is composed of solo and choral parts by two opposing phenomena: “*Sosruko* and *Ashamaz*” (heroes of Nart sagas in Circassians) or “*God and Man*” (Abkhazians) (Sokolova, 2009: 2, Tchanba, 2004: 46). Therefore, the Circassians do not consider their music as three-part polyphony. On the other hand, in the principle of the dialogue between the soloist and the *Zhyu* in the polyphony of the Western Circassian, the instrumental melody sometimes sounds with a character independent from the voice parts. In some cases, in the traditional music of the Western Circassians, instead of a soloist who sings the lyrics, the instruments, *Shichepshin* or *Qamyl* play the main melody and only the *Zhyu* is sung by the human voice. In this case, *Zhyu* basically sings a variant of the instrumental melody, but occasionally sings a contrasting melody to the instrumental melody. Contrast element in two-part vocal polyphony is found among the western Circassians and also found among the Abkhazians. Among the Abkhazians, stringed instruments-*Apkhartsa* plays the melody, and the choral part *Argyzra* sings the accompaniment (Tchanba, 2004: 48). It is possible to say that for the Abkhaz-Adyghe people, instruments such as the fiddle and end-blown flute are close to the human voice. In contrast, among Georgians, fiddle-like *Chianuri* plays only the role of accompaniment in polyphonic singing. Among the Circassians, the wind instrument *Qamyl*, which has characteristics similar to the human voice, plays independent melodies that seem to contrast to the vocal parts, more than the melody of *Shichepshin*. The Circassians *Qamyl*, which is made from reeds, has a scale such as a-b-c-d-e-f-g-a', and can also produce overtones by blowing harder. The end-blown flute, which is widespread among the Circassians and other North Caucasian people, is an instrument found among Turkic peoples, for which the Turkish *Ney* is famous. The long-narrow fiddle of the Abkhaz-Adyghe people, like *Shichepshin* and *Apkhartsa*, is also known among the Laz people as *Chilili*, and these could be a kind of instrument, commonly called a Pontic fiddle (Kamancha). The western Circassian two-string *Shichepshin* is often tuned to the perfect fifth degree. Such a fiddle was possibly an instrument that has been widespread along the Black Sea coast for a long time. There is a belief among the the Laz people that the name of Georgian *Chianuri* originated from *Chan*, the ancient name of the Laz people. We do not know when fiddle and end-blown flute spread to the northwest Caucasus. As an example of interesting information, Sultan Khan-Giray, an excellent Circassian ethnographer of the 19th century, revealed that the *Qamyl* and *Shichepshin* had already taken root among the Circassian people at that time (Khan-Giray, 2009: 100]. In particular,

the *Shichepshin* was widespread among people of all social strata (Ibid.). In Georgia, the Black Sea coast is known as an area, where polyphony is spread. In Samegrelo (Mingrelia), Guria, and Adjara, the contrast element of vocal polyphony is prevalent. While there are very few elements of contrasting polyphony among the Abkhaz Adyghe people, this may reflect their cultural connection with the people of Western Georgia.

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