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**FOR THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
GEORGIAN AND ABKHAZIAN FOLK MUSIC**
(ACCORDING TO THE PUBLICATION "EXPEDITION
PHONO RECORDINGS OF GEORGIAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC.
OTAR CHIJAVADZE. ABKHAZIA-1970. OCHAMCHIRE AND GALI
DISTRICTS")

About the publication

This topic is one of my attempts in the study of Abkhazian music and its comparison with Georgian. It bases on the 2023 edition (a book with two audio discs) for which I was the compiler-editor and author of the introductory research letter.

Ochamchire and Gali districts (currently municipalities) are located in West Georgia. From 1921 they were part of Abkhazian ASSR, from 1991 they were administrative-territorial units of independent Georgia; since 1992 they have been occupied by Russia.

The audio recordings of the expedition to Ochamchire and Gali districts (in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia) conducted in 1970 by Otar Chijavadze (1919-1998), a distinguished collector and researcher of Georgian traditional music, are among the rare exceptions, which present Abkhazian folk song as performed by the reliable source - local residents.

The expedition was organized by the Musical and Choreographic Society of Georgia. The recording sessions were conducted in the villages of Beslakhuba, Ilori, Chlou and Ghvada of Ochamchire district; the villages of Tagiloni, Kvemo Barghebi, Dikhazurga, Chuburkhinji, Shesheleti, Okumi and the city of Gali in Gali district. Total of 96 songs were recorded. Before publication, the expedition recordings were available only to a narrow circle of specialists. Given the special importance of the lesser known material and wide interest to it, we tried to publish it as completely as possible: of the 96 recorded songs, only 2 have not been included in the edition.

The examples of the publication side by side present musical existence of Georgian and Abkhazian peoples, their individual characteristics and clear results of long-term cohabitation and cultural ties - commonality, similarity and borrowing of the singing repertoire, mutual influences expressed by various components of the musical language, including polyphony.

Along with traditional genres (wedding/groomsmen's, dance, round-dance, labor, funeral, healing, heroic, traveling, humorous, lyrical, table) there also are urban, Soviet and authorial songs composed in folk style.

Most of the examples are men's songs and are performed by them. Women rarely participate in men's songs. There are no women's songs among the expedition recordings. Mainly the examples of lyrical and humorous genres, as well as urban and Soviet style songs boast mixed performance.

Some songs with the same name are found several times, as the examples performed in different villages, possibly without much difference between them. These are: *Kuchkhi bedineri*, *Kunta bedinera*, *Bedinera*, *Voysa*, *Harira*, *Azar*. The non-selective attitude towards the material to be published explains the fact that in the audio album next to the traditionally sung examples, there also are songs performed differently: along with the songs accompanied by one *chonguri* there are examples accompanied by several *chonguris*, or vice versa, the song to be accompanied by *chonguri* is performed without instrument. In addition to solo performance of upper voices, the expedition recordings also feature the examples performed with doubled voices, rarely - group beginning of the song.

Some songs with different names have a common tune. This can be seen when comparing *Oyovokho* (Tagiloni), *Mkhedruli* (Dikhazurga), *Tokhnuri* (Chuburkhinji) and *Okhoia* (Okumi).

Hunter's song and *Song to the hunting Deities*, recorded in the same village (Chlou) at different times (July 10 and 14) are musically same (only sound at different pitches).

Origin of songs

In the recordings of the 1970 expedition, Georgian songs prevail over Abkhazian. Noteworthy is their distribution by districts. Of 48 examples from Gali district, 47 are Georgian songs, and only 1 is Abkhazian (recorded in the city of Gali). The examples from the village of Ilori, Ochamchire district, are also Georgian. The largest number of Abkhazian songs were recorded in the villages of Ghvada and Chlou, Ochamchire district. Georgian songs are also sung in these villages, though much less. Such a ratio of Georgian and Abkhazian recordings is not accidental - it corresponds to the ethnic composition of the population in Gali and Ochamchire districts. According to official data, before 1992, there were 93,8% Georgians and 0,8% Abkhazians in Gali district (<http://www.abkhazia.gov.ge/cities/GALI>); 46,2% Georgians and 36,7% Abkhazians in Ochamchire district (<http://abkhazia.gov.ge/cities/OCHAMCHIRE>).

Musical side of the recordings

The study of the expedition material allowed for the identification of incorrect names of some songs, as well as of the parallels between Georgian (Megrelian, Svan and Acharan) and Abkhazian examples, and sometimes their mutual influence.

Several examples were found interesting in terms of name. *Patardzlis mikvanis simghera* recorded in the village of Chlou at different times (July 10 and 14), is Megrelian *Kuchkhi bedineri* (audio ex. 1, 1a) (only, the second example differs from the Georgian

with a cadence phrase ending on a fifth). One *Kuchkhi bedineri* recorded in the village of Beslakhuba is actually *Bedinera* (audio ex. 2). If in the mentioned cases the names announced in the recordings are at least somewhat similar to the real ones, the same cannot be said about *Vazhebis simghera* recorded in Chlou, which is Megrelian *Harira* (audio ex. 3).

The result of Georgian musical thinking is the *Saferkhulo simghera* (Beslakhuba) (audio ex. 4), the Megrelian and Svan intonation phrases of which (from *Ochesh khvei* and *Kasletila*) entirely base on glossolalias (audio ex. 4a, 4b).

Attention-worthy is *Atlarchopa* recorded in Chlou. The example performed on July 10 (audio ex. 5) is a typical Georgian dance song in its musical regularities, the like of which is especially common in Svaneti, as the final part of round-dance songs (audio ex. 5a). The example recorded on July 14 has two parts. The second part is the same dance-song *Atlarchopa*. The first part has a different tune (audio ex. 5b), in which evident is the influence of Megrelian song (namely, of the fast section of *Ochesh khvei*). Main reason for regarding the song as Abkhazian should be the glossolalias considered Abkhazian. In connection with this, significant is the information on Samegrelo verified by Sergi Makalatia. According to it, a person suffering with epilepsy would be made dance *Atlechoba* at Ilori St. George church (Makalatia, 1941:350-351). The customs described in the work have been specified by the ethnographer through personal observation, as well as by interviewing the elderly during the expeditions he conducted in the 1920s and 1930s in the districts of Samegrelo (including Gali and Ochamchire) for the purpose of their historical-ethnographic study (Makalatia, 1941:4-5). Therefore, we have no reason to doubt the information.

Song of the Ghvada villagers (Ghvada) is based on Georgian musical thinking. Its first stanza (parts of the beginner and choir) (audio ex. 6) is Megelian *Okhoia*, and the tune in the second stanza, which gradually accelerates and segues into a dance (audio ex. 6a) is similar to that of Acharan and Svan songs. Three-part singing sounds fragmentarily.

The influence of Georgian song is obvious in three-voice example *Radeda* (Ghvada) (audio ex. 7), which is musically quite close to Acharan *Abadela* (audio ex. 7a). Abkhazian song differs from Georgian in stanzas ending with an octave interval.

The influence of Georgian (particularly Megrelian) song is observed in three-part ritual memorial song *Azar* (Chlou, Ghvada). It should be noted, that Vladimer Akhobadze indicates the influence of Georgian song on Abkhazian *Azar* as early as 1957. In the letter about Abkhazian folk music, he describes the mourning ritual in Abkhazia held a certain period after a person's passing, which, along with other rules, involves gathering and weeping of mourners around the horse of the deceased, singing *Azar* by horsemen and holding a horse-race at the end (Akhobadze, 1957:117). According to the scholar, similar ritual is widespread in the mountainous regions of Georgia, namely, in Tusheti. V. Akhobadze speaks about the presence of the cadence forms typical for Georgian folk song in *Azar* and of the sometimes inserted fourth voice *gamkivani*, which "in a fairly

high register emphasizes common grief" (Akhobadze, 1957:117). What the researcher refers to as the fourth voice (such are the examples recorded in Chlou on July 10 and in Ghvada) is actually an imitation of scream in weeping, on the background of which *Azar* was sung, like Georgian *Zari* (audio ex. 8, 8a). According to V. Akhobadze, old name of the Abkhazian hymn was changed under the influence of *Zari*, widely spread in Georgia (Akhobadze, 1957:117).

The parallels with Georgian song are presented in urban songs as well. In this regard interesting is *Nanikyara* (Ghvada) (audio ex. 9), however in this Abkhazian song only the first chord of the refrain is three-part, the rest is two-part and is sung without bass, whereas in the case of Georgian song, entire refrain would undoubtedly be three-part.

Traces of the influence of Georgian, Megrelian song can be observed in three-part *Song about the homeland* (Ghvada) (audio ex. 10). With the initial intonation movement of the stanzas it reminds of Gurian urban song *Gazapkhuli* (audio ex. 10a).

It is noteworthy that as early as 1930 Konstantin Kovach notes cultural influence of Megrelian population on Abkhazian (of the Kodori Valley, in particular) songs. As he explains, he deliberately did not entitle his collection Abkhazian folk songs, since Abkhazian origin of some of the examples included in it is questionable - in their harmony and melody they resemble Megrelian songs (Kovach, 1930:3, 4). The recorder considers such songs to be part of the culture of the Abkhazians from Kodori.

According to V. Akhobadze, the Abkhazians often perform Svan songs, especially Svan round-dance songs, sometimes in Abkhazian mode (in two voices) or on two-string *apkhertsu* (*Abkhazian Songs*, 1957:10). Sometimes first part of their songs is Abkhazian, and the second - Svan. The scholar believes, that this influence indicates close connection between the Abkhazians and Svans.

Along with the frequent characteristic features of Georgian singing tradition encountered in Abkhazian, the audio recordings of the publication contain very few reverse cases - penetration of Abkhazian into Georgian. The cadences ending with fifth interval in the first and second stanzas of Megrelian *Kuchkhi bedineri* (recorded in Chlou on July 14) can be considered as such (audio ex. 11). The same can be said about Megrelian *Bedinera* recorded in Beslakhuba (audio ex. 12). Similar interval is also encountered in the song *Si vardis vaujgude* recorded in Dikhazurga (audio ex. 13).

The expedition materials show that the Georgians have not taken anything important from the musical tradition of the Abkhazians, which is quite natural, given the extremely high development level of Georgian singing - ancient and rich tradition of three-part singing, Georgian people's melodoc, harmonious and, in general, rare logic and ordered musical thinking. It can be said that borrowing is observed only in verbal part of songs, namely in glossolalias. However, it cannot be ruled out that these glossolalias are remnants of "common Georgian musical root language" that Nino Maisuradze speaks of. According to the researcher, Abkhazian musical language, "once one of the widespread

common-Georgian musical dialects”, is kindred to Georgian, a part of the area of Georgian musical culture (Maisuradze, 2015:236).

Along the examples with more or less musical parallels with Georgian, the publication also contains purely Abkhazian songs, which are significantly different from Georgian in their characteristics. As such I consider: *Monadiris simghera* and *Simghera dachrilstvis* (Beslakhuba), *Song about a brave man*, *Hunters’ song* and *Song about Khajarat Kyakhba* (Chlou), *Uari-dada*, *Song about Marsit’s son* and *Song of hunters’ assistants* (Ghvada), *Tskhenosnuri* (Gali).

Songs with instrumental accompaniment

It should be noted, that in Abkhazian recordings of the 1970 expedition there is neither a song accompanied by an instrument nor an example of instrumental music. Songs with *chonguri* are presented only in Megrelian repertoire from Gali district. Chonguri/chonguris accompany both traditional and Soviet-style songs.

About the polyphony of Abkhazian song

In expedition recordings Abkhazian songs are two- and three-part. Sometimes observation on different examples of the same song shows the path of partial transformation of a two-part song into a three-part example. Such are: the two-part *Simghera dachrilstvis* recorded in Beslakhuba (audio ex. 14) and three-part variant of the same song (*Song for the wounded*) recorded in Chlou (audio ex. 14a).

Middle voice must be a later adjunct to the musical tissue (since it joins in only in some places) of the three-part *Hunter’s song* recorded in Chlou (audio ex. 15) (aka *Song to the hunting Deities*).

According to V. Akhobadze, the two-part songs from Gudauta district are distinguished in more purity of national style and preservation of Abkhazian music peculiarities, as for Abkhazian three-part songs, most of them reveal some influence of Georgian (particularly, Megrelian and Svan) music (*Abkhazian Songs*, 1957:11). This is especially noticeable in Ochamchire district, with large Megrelian population and the Svans, dwelling in mountainous regions.

Grigol Chkhikvadze also considers three-part singing in Abkhazian folklore to be a “new phenomenon”. He believes that Abkhazian three-part songs are the result of the activities of choirs especially numerous in different parts of Georgia (including Abkhazia), and the influence of their active concert life, the activities of renowned Georgian singers and choirmasters Dzuku Lolua and Kitsi Gegechkori in Abkhazia (Chkhikvadze, 1975:80).

Conclusion

The 1970 expedition to Ochamchire and Gali districts was a significant step on the way to studying Georgian-Caucasian musical relations. Its historical value is evidenced by the uniqueness of the collected material. The recorded examples are indispensable for the comparative study of Georgian and Abkhazian folk music and the search for their probable common roots.

Audio examples

Kuchkhi bedineri = Patardzlis mikvanis simghera (July 10). *Expedition Phono Recordings of Georgian Traditional Music. Otar Chijavadze. Abkhazia-1970. Ochamchire and Gali Districts* (hereinafter: *Abkhazia-1970*). Tbilisi, 2023. A book with two CDs. CD 1-17.

Kuchkhi bedineri = Patardzlis mikvanis simghera (July 14). *Abkhazia-1970*, CD 1-31.

Bedinera = Kuchkhi bedineri. Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-1.

Harira = Vazhebis simghera. Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-18.

Saferkhulo simghera. Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-3.

Ochesh khvei. Field expedition to Samegrelo. (led by O. Chijavadze). (1959). Archive of the Grigol Chkhikvadze Ethnomusicology Laboratory of Tbilisi State Conservatoire (hereinafter: AEL TSC), 94-5.

Kasletila. A choir from the village of Tskhumari, Mestia district. The final concert of the National Folklore Survey-Festival (2005-2006). Tbilisi, 2006. Archive of the Anzor Erkomaishvili Folklore State Centre.

Atlarchopa (July 10). *Abkhazia-1970*, CD 1-21.

Tamar dedpal. Georgian Folk Music. Western Georgia. (2007). Tbilisi State Conservatoire, Department of Georgian Folk Music. Project *For the Revival of Georgian Folk Song*. Album with 6 CDs and booklet. Tbilisi. CD 1-10.

Atlarchopa (July 14). *Abkhazia-1970*, CD 1-30.

Song of the Ghvada villagers (I stanza). *Abkhazia-1970*, CD 1-38.

Song of the Ghvada villagers (II stanza). *Abkhazia-1970*, CD 1-38.

Radede. Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-32.

Abadela. Field expedition to Achara. (led by V. Akhobadze). (1958). AEL TSC, 64-22.

Azar. Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-45.

Zar of the village of Latali (Mestia district). *Le chant du monde LDX 274 990. Georgia. Polyphony of Svaneti*. Recordings, notes and musical transcriptions by Sylvie Bolle-Zemp. 1994. №18.

Nanikyara. Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-37.

Song about the homeland. Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-42.

Gazapkhuli. Field expedition to Guria. (led by G. Chkhikvadze). (1963). AEL TSC, 156-7.

- Kuchkhi bedineri. Abkhazia-1970*, CD 1-31.
Bedinera. Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-1.
Si vardis vaujgude. Abkhazia-1970, CD 2-8.
Simghera dachrilstvis (Beslakhuba). Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-7.
Song for the wounded (Chlou). Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-16.
Hunter's song. Abkhazia-1970, CD 1-14 (aka *Song to the hunting Deities*. CD 1-23).

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