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### CHVENIEROBA FESTIVAL AND TRADITIONAL MUSIC RELATED TO IT

“Chve” in Megrelian means a young oak sapling. “Chvenieri” is the name of the mountain on which the Martvili church is erected. In Megrelia the *chvenieroba* feast was celebrated on the eighth day after Easter, i.e. on Monday, following St. Thomas’s Sunday. As the oral tradition has it the establishment of the feast is associated with the village of Bandza. The available ethnographic material connects it with the name of the Apostle St. Andrew, one of Christ’s disciples. According to the data provided by informants the *chvenieroba* feast had been observed until the 1920s, when eventually it was prohibited by Communists. Our interest in the feast was aroused by the traditional music associated with it.

On the site of the present Martvili church there used to be a big oak (*didi chqoni, chqondidi*) to which a man’s figure, made of cast-iron (according to some data – of copper), was tied. The idol was called *kapunia/rokapunia*, alias *didgmiri/dodgimiri*. In some people’s imagination it was an eagle, which had its nest in *chqondidi*. The priests of the idol were called *chqondari*. At the idol’s feast – *tutashkhoba* (the Moon’s day, Monday) – a mother was to sacrifice her child to *kapunia*. The child had to be exactly twelve months old, i.e. born in the previous year. *Chqondaris* cast lots to choose a child to be sacrificed. On Saturday the parents of the child chosen by the deity gave a family party, and on Sunday – *Bzhashkha* (the Sun’s day) the child was taken in the carriage to the oak, where the sacrificial ceremony was to be held (Mashurko, 1894: 376-377; Eliava, 1962: 15). By the way, in the ethnographic material the fact of the mother’s standing on the Martvili Plateau and wailing loudly over her child is also attested.

As the story goes Andrew-the-First-Called and Simeon the Canaanite arrived in Martvili. St. Andrew demolished the idol, cut down the oak and erected a cross on the site. Before the eyes of the devout he hit the big oak with an axe and when it remained unharmed, the people recognized the power of Christ. Andrew dispatched a herald to announce the news that mothers would never have to sacrifice their children again. The legend tells that a population of Samegrelo adopted Christianity following St. Andrew’s preaches. Some pagans wanted to obstruct his apostolic activity and stole his shoes and crozier at night. The apostle went to Martvili bare feet. When he cut down the big oak tree the just-converted population of Bandza told him: “You have cut down the big oak tree, but many young oak trees are growing on the slope. People will take care of one of them and start worshipping them”. St. Andrew responded: “If we cut the big tree down, it will grow again, so let us uproot all the oaks”. Upon their return from Martvili the Bandzans celebrated the fact of cutting down the oak tree and called this *chveenia/chvenieroba* as a token of the victory of Christianity over paganism.

The existence of this feast in the nineteenth century is attested by the fact that Prince Meki Paghava sent a special invitation to Ilia Chavchavadze to take part in the celebration. The guests were asked how they liked the ritual, Ilia answered wittily: “This should be called not *chvenieroba* (feast of the oak), but *mshvenieroba* (feast of beauty)”. Information about the *chvenieroba* feast was published in nineteenth-century periodicals. It was described by Ekvtime Taqaisvili, Sergi Makalatia, Korneli

Kekelidze and others.

Ketevan Chitanava was the first to study this feast from the viewpoint of ethnomusicology. Like other researchers she considered the round-dance song “*Mze shina da mze gareta*” (performed in different regions of Georgia at the childbirth celebration ritual, at the bedside of a recently confined woman; it was also sung to cure the child suffering from an infectious disease, it functioned as a soporific as well) to be the most ancient specimen associated with the solar cult (Chitanava, 1987: 66). It should be noted that this information, obtained by the scholar in the 1980s, represents the joining in the *Mzeshina* round dance in an original manner: linking their little fingers the men form a circle.

The scholar also looks at the polyphonic *Kirialesa*, in whose intonational material the link with the simple variants of Megrelian round dance songs and the specimens with the basic quart from other provinces is revealed. It is noteworthy that before that Dimitri Arakchivili also referred to the round dance mode of *Kirialesa* (Arakchiev, 1908: 85). Its kinship with the round dance songs has also been established lately by Otar Kapanadze (Kapanadze, 2011: 52-53).

In the hymns, together with the unchanged formula of *Kirie Eleison* (God, have mercy on us) in western Georgia its folklorized, modified forms are also attested in the names of some songs and refrains: *kirialesa*, *kirialersa*, *kirjalesa*, *krialeso*, *kilileisa*, *leison da kiria*, *eisedo kiria*, *eisade kirie*, *sadavoi kirialesa*.

In our opinion in the praying formula such changes must have taken place in the years when the Communist ideology was raging, and orthodox religion was persecuted purposefully. An analysis of the available scholarly literature and of the notated, audio and video recordings provided grounds to emphasize some interesting details in the dramatic composition of the above-mentioned feast.

It is proved that *chvenieroba* was a truly popular feast where the participants, united in different groups, performed a round dance, played musical instruments, and recited poems. The festivities lasted for a long time.

When describing pagan rituals, one of the informants associates *rokapunia*, the old name of the idol, with the term “*rokva*” meaning moving, dancing to an instrumental accompaniment. After the destruction of the idol and adopting Christianity, the people continued the tradition of getting together at *chqondidi*, walking round the oak tree and making merry, but now they sacrificed a pig. On Shrovetide Thursday or on New Year’s day the Kapunoba feast, which may be a remnant of the pagan festival, was celebrated and a pig or a boar was sacrificed. Tradition associates the ancient name of the feast *Kapunoba/Rokapunoba/Didgmiroba* with the ancient name of the idol. The name of the sacrificial pig *Okapune* must have stemmed from the name of the idol as well. The name of the idol *Kapuna* (*Kap-una*) must be a diminutive form of *Kap*, which in the Georgian language and its dialects is connected with a tree and its branch (Chukhua, 2000-2003: 120; Orbeliani, 1991: 352). The idol *Chqondidi/Kapunia/Rokapunia/Didgmiri* is clearly the highest deity, demiurge.

It is possible that in the name of the pre-Christian idol a special role for the devotional ritual – round dance – was emphasized. It is noteworthy that in *Bandza*, *Zelkova* (water elm), a hardwood cult tree from the elm family, has since early times been used as a percussion or signal instrument in this country.

During the *Tchvenieroba* feast the ringing of church bells and the sounds of a horn are heard constantly; though in the sources there is no special information whether they sound together or not, but the percussion and wind instruments are used in the same semantics. It is noteworthy that the horn is associated with religious feasts in other parts of Georgia too (Svaneti, Lechkhumi, Abkhazeti)<sup>1</sup>. In

the countryside it was used to give a battle alarm, to call people to a community gathering or to take part in field work. The horn was sounded during hunting and in battles. In Abkhazeti they blew the horn when cursing a cattle stealer, and the one who gave him shelter (Shilakadze, 2007: 109). In the information about Samegrelo, with a special mention of the length of the horn (“at midday the call people with church bells and a long horn”) there is an indication that there was a short horn as well.

At the following stage sports competitions also take place against the uninterrupted musical background. Together with the sounds of the bells and the horn *Kirileison* is also heard and in connection with this specimen the three terms – *chanting*, *singing* and *exclamation* – are used. After picking up the red ball placed at the Royal Door, “the priest walks around the church. People, chanting *Kirileison* continuously, follow him. Accompanied by the ringing of the church bells and the sounds of the horn they head for the field where *Lelooba*, a devotional game, is held”<sup>2</sup>.

It is possible that the term *chanting* was used due to the prayer text of the specimen. In Georgian chanting practice this hymn is used when ordaining a priest (Shughliashvili, 2006: 242, Erkvandze, 2011: 147). As an example we bring here is Artem Erkomaishvili’s variant (audio ex. 1). *Kirileison*, accompanied by exclamations, was associated with the ritual of shaking, rooting up, dragging away and planting a tree upside down, with its roots above the ground. According to the material preserved at the Martvili Museum of Regional Studies, the elders of the village chose a young oak at the village cemetery. An old man would climb it, shake its branches singing *Eisade Kirie*. As Givi Eliava, an eye-witness to the feast, says, men would dig up the tree, shoulder it and chanting the same words first walked around the cemetery three times, then they would walk round the Shaorkari St George’s church situated in the centre of Bandza. The uprooted tree was leaned against the church wall with its roots up. It was at this time that the round dance song *Mze shina da mze garet*a was performed; in our opinion it might have been adjusted to the Tchvenieroba feast due to the associative connection with the second birth of the saved child or the childbirth ritual. In the Christian Tchvenieroba the overturned tree was a symbol of defeating the idol. Uprooting the tree meant defeating the devil (Ghambashidze, 2011). The tree branches were broken into small pieces and taken home. There they were placed in small leather bags specially made for this purpose: the bag was kept so that the family’s welfare would be guaranteed till the next year. In the village of Najakhari, Veditkary the tradition of uprooting the tree was also called *Sofioba*, associating the word with the Megrelian word “sofua” – digging out, uprooting (Eliava, 1962:16; Ghambashidze, 2005). According to the oral tradition in the village of Bandza, the related families of the Kekelias and the Gabunias, who maintained strict exogamous relations, the ritual of planting the tree upside down was still observed about 25-27 years ago. The participants of the ritual said, “Let the one who violates the oath sworn between the Kekelias and the Gabunias be ruined like this tree”. Early in the morning they brought the uprooted tree. One man would start digging a hole in the ground, the rest would start a round dance singing *Eisedo kiria* (Ghambashidze, 2011)<sup>3</sup>.

The short phrases of the specimen to be recited at that time must have been like the passages from the specimens of work songs – *Naduri*, *Elesa*. And factually, the expedition of 2011 managed to record similar examples (see video fragments). It is noteworthy that *Lesion da Kiria*, recorded in Samegrelo in the year 1902 by Dimitri Araqishvili (Arakchiev, 1908: No. 17), and *Kilile*, written down by Constantine Kovatch in Samurzaqano in the year 1929 (Kovatch, 1930: No. 9), connected with the completion of work, namely work in the cornfields, are two-part songs.

In many provinces of western Georgia at the last stage of collective work *Elesa* was sung. According to Apolon Tsuladze *Elesa* was sung without words when carrying heavy weights, logs and a wine press. No wonder that they used short, but most suitable, phrases to ask God for assistance in achieving their goal. When the work was very hard it was impossible even to think about poetry. In the exclamations: *Elesa da vio, oo, ele, ele, aha, elesa da vio* and *oi* in some places (especially in western Guria) these words were followed by *Kirio* instead of *vio* (Tsuladze, 2009: 26). Therefore we think that some scholars' (Jemal Chkhaidze, Malkhaz Erkvanidze) conjecture to the effect that the song *Elesa* (hesa) stems from *Kirie eleison* is quite plausible. The *Helasa* that has survived in Lazeti and is sung when dragging a boat or a fishing net out of the water may also be added to the above. Among the Georgian population who are under the Turkish influence the "petrification" of Christian prayer formulae in refrains must be considered to be a very significant fact. Our compatriots, living in the Ligani Gorge (Turkey), perform such specimens up to the present time (Malaqmadze, 2002).

It is obvious that when walking about the village or round the church the mode and the rhythmic aspect of *Kirialesa* must have been adjusted to the leg movements. Today, a similar specimen is performed in Samegrelo when going from house to house to wish people a Happy New Year (rarely it also happens at Christmas). By the way, the above tradition was described in detail by Archangelo Laberti, an Italian missionary in the 17th century (Lamberti, 1938: 137-138). It is known that the singers also carried *Chichilak*<sup>4</sup> adorned with apples, pomegranates and flowers. As when walking on Alilooba and Tchonaoba, the performers of *Kirialesa* also collected provisions and money.

"Hey, host, open the door, / Happy New Year! / Be happy, may the deuce and evil do no harm to you! / May your barn be full with millet, and your wine-cellar with wine! / Blessed is your cradle! / Exterminated be who curse you! may the elderly of your family live 700 years! / May those of your family who are far a way return home safe and sound! Please help me with some money!" – This is the translation of the New Year's wishes. The comparison of *Kirialesa* variants allows to observe the stages of the song development (ex. 1, 2).

As Ketevan Chitanava writes, the exclamation *Kirieleison* could also be heard during the *Khujish-oskhpae* round dance, which was performed at the Eliaoba (deity of weather) feast (Chitanava, 1987: 49).

It is obvious that *Chvenieroba* is a popular Christian feast-mystery created by people, its indispensable part being liturgy and at the end clergymen also took part in the play; they started playing *lelo* by throwing a ball. The fact that *Chvenieroba* is a feast established by people is corroborated by Ioane-Zosime's calendar. According to the calendar on every day after St Thomas's Sunday, except Monday, some church feast is fixed (Kekelidze, 1957: 279).

The feast of *Chvenieroba* coincides with the period of winter solstice, nature's revival and turning towards spring. For its part, the ritual bears a great resemblance to the New Year's customs and traditions as well, where a special place is again occupied by a tree, a tree-branch or *Chichilaki* (a tree decorated for the New Year). It must have been due to this fact that of all the nine available variants<sup>5</sup>, four are Megrelian meant for the New Year, and their intonational analysis clearly reveals their association with the specimens of round-dance mode. One specimen, the Imeretian *Kirialesa* is considered to be an Easter round-dance. In our opinion this fact is a good argument to prove that Christmas and Easter songs have originated from the same source (Ghambashidze, 2004: 242). As for the round-dance tradition of their performance, quite evidently, it refers to their pagan provenance. Their intonational kinship with the work songs also substantiates their antiquity and association with

the cult of fertility.

A complex, comparative and methodical study of the Chvenieroba feast gives us grounds to follow the real process of the superseding of pagan customs and traditions by Christian ones, to observe the co-existence of secular and ecclesiastic traditions for a long period of time, to carry out research into the problems of the interrelation between the multi-part chants constructed on the common musical regularities and folk songs and also into the genesis and evolution of some specimens of songs.

The issues of the relations with the Hellenic world of rituals and the Byzantine-Georgian parallels of the Kirie Eleison melody also call for a special study.

P.S. Our consideration on the peculiarities of an example performed when uprooting a tree was confirmed by the manuscript discovered at the archive of Georgia State radio in 2013 (audio ex. 3).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> From this viewpoint a sketch by the 17th-century Italian missionary Don Christoforo de Castelli is very interesting, he depicts the horn against the background of the Episcopal cathedral in Dranda (Castelli, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Spring sport games are still held in Georgia (for instance the competition of the inhabitants of the village of Shukhuti in Guria is even filmed). It cannot be excluded that the song *Burtis Gamarjveba (Victory of the Ball)*, (Kokeladze, 1984:284), presented at one of the Soviet sports games by the outstanding choral conductor Varlam Simonishvili may have resulted from the compounding of antiphonic exclamations and intonations to be performed during such games.

<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that the tradition of uprooting the tree was accompanied by the tradition of tree planting on the eve of Easter: a man should plant an oak or a linden to be stronger.

<sup>4</sup> Chichilaki – a stick, mainly from a hazel bush with the bark shaved off, the shavings being left on the stick like curls. Ch. Is adorned with sweets and fruit. It is an attribute of a New Year celebration in some parts of Georgia (translator's note).

<sup>5</sup> We mean D. Araqishvili's, K. Kovatch's, A. Khorava's, E. Garaqanidze's, D. Shugliashvili's, N. Shvelidze's, M. Khukhunaishvili's, N. Makharadze's notated specimens.

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მაგალითი 1. სადავო კირიალესა. საშობაო (ფრაგმენტი). ჩაწერილია 2000 წ. თბილისში მარინა ხუხუნაიშვილის მიერ. ასრ. ჩხოროლწყეული ნაზი ჯაიანი. ნოტირება მ ხუხუნაიშვილისა **Example 1. Sadavoi Kirialesa.** Christmas (fragment). Recorded by Marina Khukhunaishvili in 2000. Performer by Nazi Jaiani from Chkhorotsku. Transcribed. by M.khukhunaishvili

The first system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a whole rest followed by the lyrics: "sa sa - da - voi ki - ri - lei - sa". The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, starting with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4-B4, quarter notes C5-B4, and quarter notes A4-G4. The bottom staff is the bass line, starting with a whole rest followed by quarter notes G2, F2, E2, and D2.

The second system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line with lyrics: "1. chqin men - dze - li kho - shi - a - ni, qo - mi - o - ti o - shi - a - ni." The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, starting with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4-B4, quarter notes C5-B4, and quarter notes A4-G4. The bottom staff is the bass line, starting with a quarter note G2, followed by eighth notes F2-E2, quarter notes D2-C2, and quarter notes B1-A1.

The third system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line with lyrics: "sa sa - da - voi ki - ri - lei - sa". The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, starting with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4-B4, quarter notes C5-B4, and quarter notes A4-G4. The bottom staff is the bass line, starting with a whole rest followed by quarter notes G2, F2, E2, and D2.

1. chqin mendzeli khoshiani,  
qomi oti oshiani.

2. ch'kich'kit'ia mekhokhuns,  
psua qocha napudas.

3. shors (jars) mitini qorunsuda,  
asho qorch'arapudas.

1. Oh, you my attractive host,  
Please give me a one hundred bank note

2. An ant is crawling  
May it have legs.

3. If you have someone in the army/ gone far away,  
May he/she return home safe.



მაგალითი 2. კირიალესა. საახალწლო (ფრაგმენტი). ჩაწერილია 1990-იან წწ. ედიშერ გარაკანიძის მიერ. ასრულებდა მარტვილის რაიონის სოფ. ბანძის ანსამბლი ომარ ხუხუას ხელმძღვანელობით. ნოტირებულია ქეთევან გელაშვილის მიერ

**Example 2. Kirialesa.** New year song (fragment). Recorded by Edisher Garakanidze in the 90s of the past century. Performed by the ensemble from v. Bandza, Martvili district, under the leadership of Omar Khukhua. Transcribed. by Ketevan Gelashvili

ჰე - ი, მენ - ძე - ლი, კა - რი გა - ნჯი, ა - ხალ - წა - ნა - სა მგ - ა - სვა - მა,  
 he - i, men - ze - li, ka - ri ga - nji, a - xa - le - ca - na - sa ma - ga - xva - ma.

ე - ნა ჯე - ში, შხვა ა - ხალი, ჯგი - რო ბუ - ათა გე - ე - ხარი,  
 e - na je - shi, shkva a - xa - li, jgi - ro bu - a - ta ge - e - xa - ri,

დია - სა ვარ - ცი - ლე - ბუ - და - სა ე - შმა - კი - დო მა - ზა - კვა - ლი, ჰო,  
 dya - sa var - ci - le - bu - da - sa e - shma - ki - do ma - za - kva - li, ho,

ო - ხო - ხო - ი, კი - რჯა - ლე - სა, ო - ხო - ხო - ი დო კი - რჯა - ლე - სა,  
 o - xo - xo - i, ki - rja - le - sa, o - xo - xo - i do ki - rja - le - sa,

ო - ხო - ხო - ი, კი - რჯა - ლე - სა, ო - ხო - ხო - ი დო კი - რჯა - ლე - სა, ჰო,  
 o - xo - xo - i, ki - rja - le - sa, o - xo - xo - i do ki - rja - le - sa ho.