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HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE PROCESS OF THE FORMATION OF GEORGIAN POLYPHONIC SINGING

Despite the current interest by Georgian and foreign ethnomusicologists, very little of their attention has focused on the diachronic (historical) aspects of Georgian polyphonic folk songs. Due to their variety and the scarcity of historical information, studies of the development of different kinds of Georgian polyphony and research into how they are correlated are hardly more than hypotheses. But it our duty, the duty of Georgian musicologists, to select the most solid and best-substantiated models of development of Georgian traditional polyphony out of existing hypotheses.

Of the scholars the greatest interest in this problem was expressed in the works of G. Chkhikvadze, S. Aslanishvili and J. Jordania. Their attention was focused both on the origin of polyphony (two-part singing in general) and the mechanism of shifting from two-part to three-part singing. It should be noted that comparatively clear-cut hypotheses were suggested about the latter.

According to the works of Georgian scholars dealing with the above problem, three hypothetical trends of the origin of Georgian polyphony (two-part and three-part singing) can be defined. They are:

- a) The appearance of another, new part, coherent with the existing part;
- b) The blending into the vertical, already existing alternating parts which have different functions and positions;
- c) The appearance of new parts by a variety of different methods.

In my opinion the most important is the third trend: Furthermore, why can we not accept that there can be several ways for various kinds of polyphony to emerge?

It is noteworthy that in contrast to Jordania (Jordania, 1989: 98), both Chkhikvadze and Aslanishvili suggest two equally plausible hypotheses on the origin of drone three-part polyphony (Chkhikvadze, 1964:4-5; Aslanishvili, 1954).

But the "branching out" type formation of polyphony and assumptions on its evolution do not contradict the proposition that separate trends either occurred earlier or were stage-forming. In such a homogeneous and small region as Georgia there must have been some prevailing trends in the development of polyphony. Here I should note that in my paper I avoid any attempts to date the problem under discussion.

Today the assumption is quite widespread that polyphony based on the principle of drone and ostinato belongs to antiquity, but establishing which had priority is fraught with difficulties.

I think that the simplest and oldest kind of ostinato polyphony must have been the singing by two alternating parts. In this case the parts do not sound simultaneously and there is no real polyphony. Earlier I called such a form "the *nominal* polyphony" (a similar phenomenon is called "transitional" by Chkhikvadze, 1964: 3), Aslanishvili calls it "imaginary" (Aslanishvili, 1954), N. Maisuradze calls it "hidden" (Maisuradze, 1971: 94); in the Anthology of the Museum of Man, translated by N. Kalandadze-Makharadze, such a type is called "an echo technique" (Kalandadze-Makharadze, 2001). Georgian "nominal polyphony" is ostinato by its periodicity and the rules of call and response. Drone polyphony, on the contrary, is one of the forms of real polyphony. So nominal polyphony creates preconditions for the second trend mentioned above, while drone polyphony is the consequence of the first trend.

The majority of Georgian scholars think that drone plays the decisive role in the origin and emergence of the primary form of Georgian polyphony. However, those examples on which such claims are based represent relatively short fragments of ostinato polyphony. There are very few of such drone two-part songs where the ostinato roots (or more precisely, the historic remnants of the two layers of the antiphonal call and response) are not evident.

That is why it is quite possible that two-part singing was formed by the development of the refrain-ostinato into the ostinato-continuum. Alternatively, the development could have been a prolongation of the interrupted ostinato phrase responding to the soloist simultaneously with the soloist's joining in for the second time (the second direction of the appearance of the polyphonic texture).

At first glance the role of the ostinato compositional principle in the formation of Georgian three-part singing seems insignificant. Nevertheless, if we observe the process from the point of view of where a two-part chorus responds to the soloist, and each of the three parts performs a different function, this is potentially three-part singing (ex. 1).

It should be noted that in general the system of "call and response" creates very fertile soil for the individual evolution of the alternating parts. In this case they need less coordination with each other. The appearance of a second soloist in the chorus responding to the lead singer might be connected to this factor. Initially the repeating part (repeating the soloist's melody) gradually started to individualize, leading to the formation of the third part with an altered position and function (ex. 2).

Ostinato and drone forms must have co-existed in Georgian polyphony. But if it should be necessary to emphasize the primary character of one of these two forms, it must be the ostinato. There are several reasons for this. The early music makers had an extremely acute social and magic function (revealed in rituals of corresponding intensity). It is better suited to the active, metrically and rhythmically differentiated ostinato than the spread-out drone sound. I should also refer to E. Garaqanidze's observation: "Some of the songs, which are examples of drone polyphony, in the remote past were performed by the soloist and the choir alternately" (Garaqanidze, 1997:32).

The drone principle as the means of both developing and spreading the sound can be noticed in all stages of the evolution of Georgian polyphony. For instance, drone "spreading" is attested in the modulation plan of the famous *Grdzeli Kakhuri Mravalzhameri* (table song), which, as Jordania notes, come from the more laconic and active wedding ritual round dance song *Maqruli* (best men's song) (Jordania, 1989: 116-123).

But the most important consequence of "drone spreading" must be the linking of two alternating soloists by the drone bass. Such a structure must have originated from "the drone spreading" of the ostinato bass accompanying the two soloists, or from the drone filling in the rests between the refrain ostinato phrases. The structure of the "nominal three-part" form, formed as a result of the above process, very often episodically replaces the real three-part singing, which is particularly characteristic of the long Kartli-Kakhetian table songs (ex. 3).

The evolution of drone polyphony may have followed the path described by Chkhikvadze. That is, the continuation of the soloist's singing against the responding bass chorus (Chkhikvadze, 1964:2) (ex. 4). In my opinion in this case in order to create a firm drone structure it must have been necessary to remove the strict rhythmic and call-response structure, characteristic for ostinato, or at least, to make a strict rhythmic structure somewhat vague, as occurs in some funeral dirges and cult songs.

In Georgian folklore studies, a well-known and accepted opinion states that one of

the origins of three-part singing is connected with the appearance of the “high bass”, the upper voice, an octave parallel with the bass (Chkhikvadze, 1964:5) (ex. 5). But, in my opinion, in such a doubling the drone principle should be given preference over the principle of parallel movement of the voices. In other words, “the high bass” accompanies the lead voice just as the low bass does. Such a doubled bass still maintains the function of the background, contrary to the parallel part, which follows the main melody (the one that has the functional initiative).

“The upper bass” in three-part singing is more active and is mainly parallel to the second part (leading melodic part). This process, due to the high melodic position must be linked with a gradual growth in awareness of a leading role of the highest part. In three-part structure the “high” bass expressed its increased melodic role by following the middle voice (and not the static base).

It is interesting that Georgian scholars do not express any more or less convincing assumptions about the emergence of the quite distinct principle of parallelism in Georgian polyphony.

I. Javakhishvili ascribes the appearance of parallelism (4th and 5th) in Georgian singing to the influence of musical instruments (*chonguri, panduri*) (Javakhishvili, 1938). This might be considered an unsuccessful surmise from a great scholar.

Can the principle of parallelism have appeared in Georgian songs at the very beginning, like the ostinato and drone principles?

If we consider that a typical archaic Georgian song represented a melody on a drone, it should be assumed that in this case the hypothetical parallel part had to perform the role of another (high) drone. It is more difficult to imagine melodic activation of a drone than a single melody accompanied by a parallel part. The only way parallelism could have appeared would have been a parallel doubling of the short-phrase melody of the chorus responding to the lead singer. But the small number of such phrases must have hindered the universal acceptance of parallelism as a principle.

It would be logical to suppose that the emergence and strengthening of the principle of parallel movement of parts (which I call “the principle of the shared melodic model”) is linked with the development of the melody (or to be more exact - with the growth in importance of the melody).

It cannot be denied that the growth of the volume of melodic element in Georgian song, together with the natural process of self-development, must have been connected with the appearance of Christian monodic chanting. Over time, the long phrases characteristic of monody demanded “translation” into the Georgian musical language i.e. making them polyphonic. This was successfully fulfilled. Georgians would never have been able to furnish the widely spread melody with ostinato phrases. Presumably, either the drone or a parallel accompanying (following) part was added to the existing ecclesiastic melody. At the very first glance it is clear that Georgian hymns are based on the principle of parallelism. Yet, in the sacred music of today’s Georgia, no traces can be found of the evolution of a melody accompanied by a drone bass. Why is it so?

I can suggest two different models to answer this question:

a) In Georgia the Christian monodic ecclesiastic melody was met by the ostinato polyphony, mainly based on short phrases and not by the melody based on drone.

b) The much later and fragmentary merging of the drone bass with Georgian chants must have resulted from the fact that Syrian-Byzantine unison melody was probably so alien to Georgian melody that Georgians would not adjust to it the drone (which was an integral element of their musical thought).

It is interesting to note that a similar attitude can be noticed in connection with some extremely rare Georgian unison songs, which also have a religious or magical function. Furthermore, it seems that the strict position of the Church must also have facilitated the separation of hymns from songs.

Thus in Georgian three-part hymns, in contrast with Georgian folk songs, polyphony evidently occurred without drone by furnishing the leading voice with the "co-functional" parallel (and not drone) bass part. I would like to refer to David Shughliashvili's observation: "I think that the above-mentioned principle of voice parallelism is the oldest form of performance of Georgian polyphonic hymns, which subsequently established itself as the first step of teaching hymn singing"... (Shughliashvili, 2000:176).

The parallelism of thirds between the two upper parts occurring in Georgian three-part singing is of a different origin. It is obviously a later phenomenon and must be associated with the active role of the simultaneous compositional model in Georgian singing (a common rhythmic model for all the voices). In the present stage of evolution, synchronism became the determining principle of polyphony for a large group of Georgian songs. It must be connected with the loss of functional independence of other principles, which is expressed by:

1. The stabilizing of the principle of parallel voice movement and the survival of the mainly rhythmic model from the reference melodic model;
2. The development of the drone-continuum (pedal drone) into the recitative one;
3. The ever-increasing parallel arrangement of the upper melodic voices.

This tendency together with the self-development (or maybe self-degradation) of traditional music may be associated with the influence of hymns, and, at a later period, - of European music.

Georgian four-part singing is basically linked with the Gurian and Kobuletian *Naduri* songs (harvest song). First of all I should refer to the fact that they achieve polyphonic heights on the basis of the ostinato principle. As for the emergence of the fourth voice - the moveable bass - it must be associated with the penetration of the elements of the antiphonic trio into traditional three-part harvest songs. These included a drone bass and had an ostinato tune. The concept of dividing this uniform bass into two (drone and moveable variants) cannot be used as an alternative to this process.

Translated by LIANA GABECHAVA

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მაგალითი 1.
 EXAMPLE 1.



მაგალითი 2.
 EXAMPLE 2.

მაგალიტი 3.
 EXAMPLE 3.

ჰო, ჩვე - ნი შა - სპი - ნძლის სა - სა - ხლე
 ho, chve - ni ma - spi - ndzlis sa - sa - khle

ა ჰა ა ა

მაგალიტი 4.
 EXAMPLE 4.

ხუთ - შა - ბათ ვა - თენ - დე - ბა, ღურ - ბე - ლი ა - ი - შა - ლა - ო
 khut - sha - bat ga - ten - de - ba, ghur - be - li a - i - sha - la - o

და - ჩუმ - და ჩე - მი გარ - მონ, თი - თებ ში - გა მა - ი - შა - ლა - ო და - უ
 da - chum - da che - mi gar - mon, ti - teb shi - ga ma - i - sha - la - o da - u

მაგალიტი 5.
 EXAMPLE 5.

ხმა - ლი წი - ნა - სა ხმა - ლი წი - ნა - სა ხმა - ლი წი - ნა - სა ხმა - ლი წი - ნა - სა
 khma - li tsi - na - sa khma - li tsi - na - sa khma - li tsi - na - sa khma - li tsi - na - sa