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## **Revealing of National Identity in Liturgical Music (At the Example of Georgian Ecclesiastical Chant)**

### **Abstract:**

In the article, Georgian ecclesiastical chanting art is represented as the original part of Christian art of chanting; here originality is discussed in the context of national identity. As the art of chanting, Georgian people created original system of self-expression based on general Christian norms and regularities. This originality is seen in hymnographic works, in old Georgian musical terminology, in the structure of hymnographic works, systems of musical writing, musical texture and liturgical, chanting traditions. The paper discusses where original approaches are manifested in the afore-mentioned spheres of Georgian chant and attempts to explain these peculiarities. Similar manifestation of national identity, self-expression are also encountered in other spheres of Christian art (temple architecture and icon writing, mural painting and relief) where artistic peculiarities are marked out, conditioned by national worldview, aesthetics and peculiarities of historical development. Development and dissemination of Christian culture in Europe was one of the first stages of globalization. But the Georgians transformed this culture in the context of national culture. This way emerged Georgian national Christian culture, which became the basis of Georgian nation's originality and identity.

### **Keywords:**

musical identity, christian art, georgian chants.

It is well-known that liturgical music is not free from ecclesiastical canon. It is the component part of liturgy, as well as the reading of the Holy Writ, prayers and holy actions and implies observance of ecclesiastical rules and traditions. At the same time, music, as well as vocal speech is a thinking category, which is differently manifested in the traditions of different nations and musical-liturgical traditions of local church. Musical speech equals to verbal speech when projecting religious feelings and religious archetypes. Thus, when preserving common all-Christian rules, liturgical music becomes the bearer of the characteristic features of

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national musical thinking. In this very context, we regard Georgian ecclesiastical chant, which alongside the preservation of sacred rules and traditions is the result of the rendition of Christian consciousness by means of the forms of national musical thinking.

The Georgians' attitude to chant formed throughout centuries, their care for its preservation shows that for the Georgians it was one of the means of national identification, as being Christian and being Georgian had become inseparable in the Georgians' consciousness.

It is known, that it was an accepted practice to perform Divine Liturgy in native language at local churches and Georgian churches abroad. This commenced after the transmission of Holy Spirit on the Apostles, as a result of which they were granted the talent of preaching in the mother tongue of the people among whom they disseminated Christian Truth. Hence, it was natural that nothing counteracted the translation of gospel, the Book of Hours and hymnographic works into Georgian. In VI century, if not earlier, main liturgical books were translated in Georgian language (Kekelidze 1980, 373). With the same logic, adaptation of musical tunes to Georgian was not opposed.

We suppose that the adaptation of tunes to Georgian language could not have implied only the changes determined by the phonetics of Georgian language. Georgian national spirit was inhaled by ecclesiastical chants. Multipart (three-part) chant was the form of expression acceptable for the Georgians in the entrails of Christianity, where each nation can glorify Lord by the forms closest to its spirit. Polyphonisation of tunes (cantus firmus) must have accompanied the process of "Georgianization", as polyphony is the natural, immanent feature of Georgian musical language.

Why and what for were liturgical books and hymnographic texts translated into domestic languages? To facilitate praying for a Christian believer and create the inner state, without which there is no Divine Liturgy. In their writings Holy fathers appeal to the parish to participate in the liturgy: "With your respectful presence in the church, participate in chants and prayers with your heart", or "When hearing prayers in the church, try to listen to them not only with ears but with your heart, so that the entreaty of the church becomes your own one". What does participation in liturgy mean? In the first place this implies the existence of suitable conditions for participation – performing the liturgy in the language understandable, desired and acceptable for you. So that you completely cognize and participate.

Attentive participation in liturgy would be impossible without corresponding phonetic, acoustic, and architectural environment. Thus, if

initially translating in Georgian was intended for the dissemination of Christianity, its cognition. With the lapse of time, they started looking for adequate means and tools to express religious emotions, manifested ecclesiastical literature, hymnography, icon painting and temple architecture.

This is why people of different beliefs are taken by emotions when entering the temple of another religion. Moreover, we are Orthodox Christians, but still feel little estranged at Russian or Byzantine churches. The same emotion is present when attending Divine Liturgy at another, non-Georgian church and when listening to chants, or readings in other language. Here, the question is raised - why? If it is acknowledged that Divine Liturgy at all Orthodox churches is based on all-Orthodox rules, and Christian Byzantine, Armenian, Syrian architectures follow general Christian norms. The thing is that, not only different people, but each person is inclined to one religious emotion. Correspondingly, he needs another environment and other means to express these emotions. Thus, naturally the Georgians create their own which they feel as their own. They create their own hagiography, hymnographic works in which their poetics differs from that of Byzantine authors. They “georgianize” tunes and create three-part chants equal to their self-expression, which coincide with their perception of Christian truth. They create their own architecture and do not borrow it from the others.

Christian art (temple architecture, hymnography and chant) is not only physical or acoustic objects. They express encounter with our perception. The form of devotion also implies the existence of emotional moment, how one expresses his faith, your relation via prayers. Georgian architecture follows general norms of Christian architecture. At the same time, it is the artistic image of universal Christian truth, which is familiar to the Georgian people. In what lies the aesthetics of Georgian temple?

As the renowned fine art expert Dimitri Tumanishvili notes: “When entering Georgian temple, our gaze is directed upwards”. In his opinion: “We – Georgians perceive not length or width, but height as basic dimension of the church, we feel verticality, and this is the aesthetics of Georgian church” (Tumanishvili 2014).

To which form of expressing religious emotions are inclined the Georgians, with their spiritual construction? Of course, to the polyphonic form. In the Georgians’ musical thinking, perception of verticality manifested in temple architecture is revealed in vertical sounding. If Medieval Byzantine, Slavic and Russian single-part chant expresses horizontal perception of space, the Georgians’ musical space expresses the vertical one. The 11<sup>th</sup> century Georgian philosopher Ioane Petritsi brought this to the

level of philosophical notion, thus confirming the existence of polyphony in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and its highly artistic value (Pirtskhalava 2003, 114)

Georgian neumatic system is coordinated vertically. The neumas, disposed above and below the verbal text of hymn, represent music incarnation of the hymn, reflecting one another mirrorwise. In this case Oniani draws attention to the principle of symmetry and discusses it in the aspect of symbolic (Oniani 2004, 30). Famous Georgian ethnomusicologist Otar Chijavadze relates the above-the-line and below-the-line disposition of neumes to polyphony: “The ending of the eirmi of each voice part is denoted by below-the-line neumes. Proceeding from this, we consider it quite natural for below-the-line neumes to denote bass melody” (Chidjavadze 1954, 37). Georgian neumatic notation is the original system to write down unique Georgian tunes, making it different from its contemporary Byzantine notation. Here, we would also like to express our opinion about below-the-line signs. If they denote the movement of bass part, why do not they accompany the entire chant text? And why are they abundantly used only in ending constructions? We agree with Chijavadze’s supposition; however we never found the answer to this question. In our opinion, these signs may express the freedom of bass part movement in octave coordination with the top voice in cadence until their unison or on the way to fifth accord. It can be supposed in final stanza or phrase the bass is freer than the top part, exactly from this commences the replacement of parallel, complex movement by the polyphonic one, similarly as in West European organum; if this supposition is close to reality, it would not have been necessary to use special signs to denote the simultaneously moving bass. The polyphonic form of professional music in the last quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century would not have been so developed, as was under the conditions of Georgian Renaissance (XII c.). There is much testifying to this in Georgian chant examples, which is expressed in the existence of archaic sonorities of  $4_8$ -s and  $5_9$ -s. Thus, writing system also elaborates original ways for the documentation of polyphonic chants in Georgian hymnographers’ oeuvre.

Here, I would like to particularly underline the meaning of chanting and attitude to it in the Georgians’ secular life, which clearly exposes value categories of the nation. It is known, that education is the means for world cognition, which is very important for the formation of personality. If we discuss how significant chanting was for the domestic system of family education, from this standpoint it will clearly show the orientations of the Georgians’ outlook.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The academies founded at the monasteries in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, which were powerful centers of Georgian culture and education, ceased their existence in the 14<sup>th</sup> century due to the historical vicissitudes.

Historical facts confirm that Georgian noble laymen's education based on the study of ecclesiastical chants (eirmi). A young person should have learnt chanting art since early age. Therefore, in Georgia "it was difficult to find a family where family members didn't know chanting" (Khundadze 1911), and "it was considered as complete ignorance not knowing chanting by nobles, even by women" (Machabeli 1864, 49-73).

Historical sources and ecclesiastical works contain the data about clergymen mastered in chanting; which is natural. But emphasizing the knowledge of chants by laymen shows that such knowledge particular honour and underlined the importance of Christian chants in the system of education. Equalization of chants to the teaching of Holy Write and poetry indicates that chant too was the means of nation's self-expression and played significant role in the formation of value system.

For instance, the author of Meskhetian chronicle<sup>3</sup> among other laudatory features of Mzechabuk<sup>4</sup> mentions that "Mzechabuk was a big lover of books and accomplished chanter, and had beautiful voice" (Javakhishvili 1990, 153). The example of Nikoloz Baratashvili<sup>5</sup> once again confirms the role of chanting in children's upbringing. It is known, that the inspiration of Baratashvili's poem "My Prayer" was the heirmos "*Soplisa zghvai aghdzrul ars*" ("Beholding the sea of Life"). Zurab Chavchavadze<sup>6</sup> duly mentions that Baratashvili may have got familiarized with this heirmos in his childhood, all the more that the poet got family-education and went to school only at the age of 10 (Ch'avch'avadze 1993, 19). In Georgia of the times after Baratashvili, teaching eirmi to children does not lose its importance in the education system. This indicates to spiritual and common aesthetic orientations which existed since the creation of these chants and continued their life in the Georgians' consciousness of later times.

Thus, equalization of mastering the chant art with teaching of the Bible and poetry indicates to the fact that, chanting as the one of the important occurrences in Georgian spiritual culture was paid very great importance in the system of Georgians' spiritual values and national consciousness, while protection and maintenance of their traditions. All the above-mentioned confirms those spiritual connections and common esthetic characteristics which continued existence in the consciousness of

3 One of the most important sources of Georgia's history, including the data on Samtskhe-Saatabago and political history of neighboring countries.

4 *Atabeg* of Samtskhe-Saatabago in 1500-1515. In the Kingdom of Georgia *Atabeg* was one of the highest court titles created by Queen Tamar (12<sup>th</sup> c.) The *atabeg* of Georgia was a vizier and a Lord High Tutor to Heir Apparent. In 1334, the title became hereditary in the Jaqeli family who ruled the Principality of Samtskhe.

5 Prince Nikoloz «Tato» Baratashvili, Georgian poet – romanticist (1817-1845).

6 Georgian literator (1953-1989).

Georgians since creation these chants. These connections were not ceased till the beginning of XX century.

After the abolishment of autocephaly of XIX century Georgian church, the policy which was directed by Russian exarchs to erase Georgian national identity and the characteristics indicating its values, declared a special battle against Georgian chanting. Russia realized very well that Georgian chanting presented the prominent symbol of national self-expression. Since 60-ies of XIX century, the movement which began to save and defend Georgian chanting was the answering reaction against the Russification policy which was carried out in Georgia. In thinking of defenders and supporters of Georgian chanting, it is obvious, importance of Georgian chanting from the point of view of maintenance of the national identity. These connections existed until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Soviet ideology applied barbaric methods to erase national identity and value orientations.

Therefore, the agitation concerned with danger to lose a chanting tradition was very fierce as well as joy connected with its trying for restoration.<sup>7</sup> The perception of Georgians and their attitude to Georgian church chanting as to the important occurrence defining Georgian identity and spiritual culture found its reflection in the speech delivered by Philimon Karbelashvili<sup>8</sup> in front of Bodbe monastery students of Georgian chanting. He spoke in his speech about the respect towards chanting which existed historically. He compares the decline of chanting with weakening of christianity and strengthening of church with fight for its restoration. He appeals young people to participate in saving and defending of chanting, maintenance of traditions, tries to show them glory of Georgian chanting and its high value (Karbelashvili 1864, 43-84).

Thus, Georgian chant, which reflects Christian emotions, is the symbol of national self-expression. This exceptionally rich spiritual treasure is not only the element accompanying Divine Liturgy, but tenderly preserved musical chronicle as well, which survived thanks to being transferred from monasteries to families and communities. Traditions of Christian art of chanting are so deeply imprinted in the Georgians'

7 In Polievktos Karbelashvili's (Perfect chanter, representative of Karbelashvili chanter's family 1855–1936) opinion, "a killer of a native chanting and song is worse than a man's eater – be it a native person or foreigner". He compares losing of national chanting and song and its change with losing of the native language, moreover, losing of the native country (Karbelashvili 1898, 9).

8 Philimon Karbelashvili (1836–1879). One of the representatives of famous chanter's family – Karbelashvili family (five brothers Karbelashvili). For their efforts and activities in the preservation of Georgian musical and religious traditions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, were canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church in 2011.



spirit and mind that the trace of Byzantine chant tradition absorbed and “Georgianized” by Georgian chant is still alive in its musical speech: when humming, when not knowing verbal text or purposefully singing only the tune we use onomatopoeias and phonemes such as *tararam*, *rim-tariro*, *taranano*, etc. And we do not even suspect that this is “Tirerim” one of the ornamented elements of *Cretamata* calophonic style of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine chanting which has been adapted in Georgian folk music as *tararano*. It is also encountered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Georgian literature “*Vintsa katsia*, *aranano*; *chokha –jachvia*, *taranano*; *kudi nabdisa*, *aranano*, *chabalakhia!*”<sup>9</sup> (G. Leonidze – the novel “*Tsitsikore*”).

Thus, Georgian ecclesiastical chant is the organic part of all-Orthodox art of chanting, at the same time imbued with national musical consciousness, testifying to the Georgians’ highly aesthetic orientations and wide-scale of musical thinking. It presents the united system for expressing Christian values, which distinguishes Georgian Christian art from that of other Orthodox cultures. This is original embodiment of the universal, referred to as Christian truth.

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<sup>9</sup> It is not accidental that tune and structure of the mentioned folk-song, widely spread in Kartli (east Georgia) reveals musical relationship with the Eucharistic chant – “We Praise Thee”.

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## Тамар Чкеидзе

### Откривање националног идентитета у литургијској музици (на примеру грузијског црквеног појања)

У овом чланку, уметност грузијског црквеног појања је представљена као оригинални део хришћанске уметности појања, с тим што се оригиналност разматра у контексту националног идентитета. У уметности појања, грузијски народ је створио оригинални систем самоизражавања, заснован на општим хришћанским нормама и правилностима. Ова оригиналност се види у химнографским радовима, у старој грузијској музичкој терминологији, у структури химнографских радова, системима музичког писања, музичкој текстури и литургијској традицији појања. У раду се истражује где се манифестују оригинални приступи у раније поменутиим сферама грузијског појања и тежи се објашњењу ових особености. Сличне манифестације националног идентитета (самоизражавања) се, такође, срећу у другим сферама хришћанске уметности (храмовној архитектури и иконопису, сликању мурала и рељефу), где су уметничке карактеристике означене и условљене националним погле-



дом на свет, естетиком и особеностима историјског развоја. Развој и ширење хришћанске културе у Европи представљали су једну од првих етапа глобализације. Међутим, Грузијци су ту културу трансформисали у контексту националне културе. Тако је настала грузијска национална хришћанска култура, која је постала основа самониклости и идентитета грузијске нације.

**Кључне речи:**

музички идентитет, хришћанска уметност, грузијско појање.