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Georgian *Changi***Abstract:**

The unique culture of Georgia, located on the crossroads between Europe and Asia, was formed under the conditions of interrelation with other cultural centers. Instrumental music was fairly well developed in old Georgia; presented here will be a large number of musical instruments. Our discussion is based on written monuments, frescoes and archaeological data.

The paper deals with the group of Georgian string, more precisely harp-like instruments; these were disseminated into some countries of the Northern and Central Caucasus: the Georgian *changi*, Abkhazian *aiuma*, Kabardinian *pshina dequaqua*, Karachayan *pshedegequaqua*, Balkarian *qil-qobuz/qanir qobuz*, and the Ossetian *duadastanon*. Of the afore-mentioned, the Georgian *changi* has survived only in Svaneti – one of Georgia's alpine regions. To its antiquity and uninterrupted local tradition testify clay and bronze figurines (6th cent A.D.) unearthed by archaeological excavations, and the material is confirmed in the 5th and 10th-20th century Georgian written sources. There were two terms referring to the Georgian harp-like instrument: *changi* (from the 10th c. until today, Persian *chank*) and *shimekvshe* (the local Svan name, meaning bended arm and related to the Caucasian legend of the instrument's origin). There is a consideration that *knari* was rather a lyre-type, than harp-like instrument. Curt Sachs considers the harps discovered in Ur (2700 B.C), as the analogs of Georgian *changi*; these were decorated with the figurines of two horses and an ox.

The paper touches upon the place of *changi* in Georgian instrumentarium, ensemble traditions, social function and sacral meaning, number of strings, tuning and performance possibilities.

Key words:*changi*, Georgian musical instruments, harp, lyre, Svaneti, Georgia**Introduction**

The unique culture of Georgia, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, was formed under conditions of interaction with other cultural centres.

Georgia is a country of rich traditional musical culture. Up to 17 musical dialects, as well as utterly diverse forms of polyphony, exist within its small territory. It is not accidental that it is nicknamed the country of vocal polyphony. Here the prominence of instrumental music is relatively low; that is why this part of Georgian musical culture is relatively less studied. Alongside the developed forms of musical instruments, relatively simple and archaic

forms are preserved in the Georgian traditional instrumentarium, including wind, string, percussion and keyboard instruments. In ancient Georgia, instrumental music was quite well developed. We can affirm this based on various written sources, frescoes and archeological data.

My report is concerned with the group of Georgian string musical instruments, namely, those of the harp type. We shall discuss the place of the *changi* in the Georgian instrumentarium (Figure 1–6), its description and technology of manufacture, the number of strings, their arrangement, the instrument's musical and performing abilities, ensemble traditions, social function, and sacral importance.

Harp-like musical instruments were disseminated in Asia, Africa and Europe (Galpin, Sachs, Shilakadze, Lawergren, Montagu, etc.). In the near past, the musical instruments of this type were represented among certain peoples of the Northern and Central Caucasus: Abkhazian *aiuma*, Kabardian *pshina dequaqua*, Karachayian *pshedegequaqua*, Balkarian *qil-qobuz/qanir qobuz*, Ossetian *duadastanon*. The Georgian *changi* persists in everyday life only in Svaneti, one of Georgia's alpine regions.

Svaneti is a mountainous region situated in the northwest of Georgia and 65 percent of its territory is elevated more than 2000 meters above sea level. According to modern data, about 30,000 people inhabit this region. Svaneti is a unique setting in which the past and modernity blend together in a paradoxical way. On the one hand, the Svans enjoy almost all the goods and commodities of modern civilization, including mobile communications and media technologies; on the other hand, a large portion of the population has preserved old beliefs and representations, folk and religious-cultic feasts and rituals. The religion of the Svans is a syncretism of Orthodox Christian faith and pre-Christian beliefs.

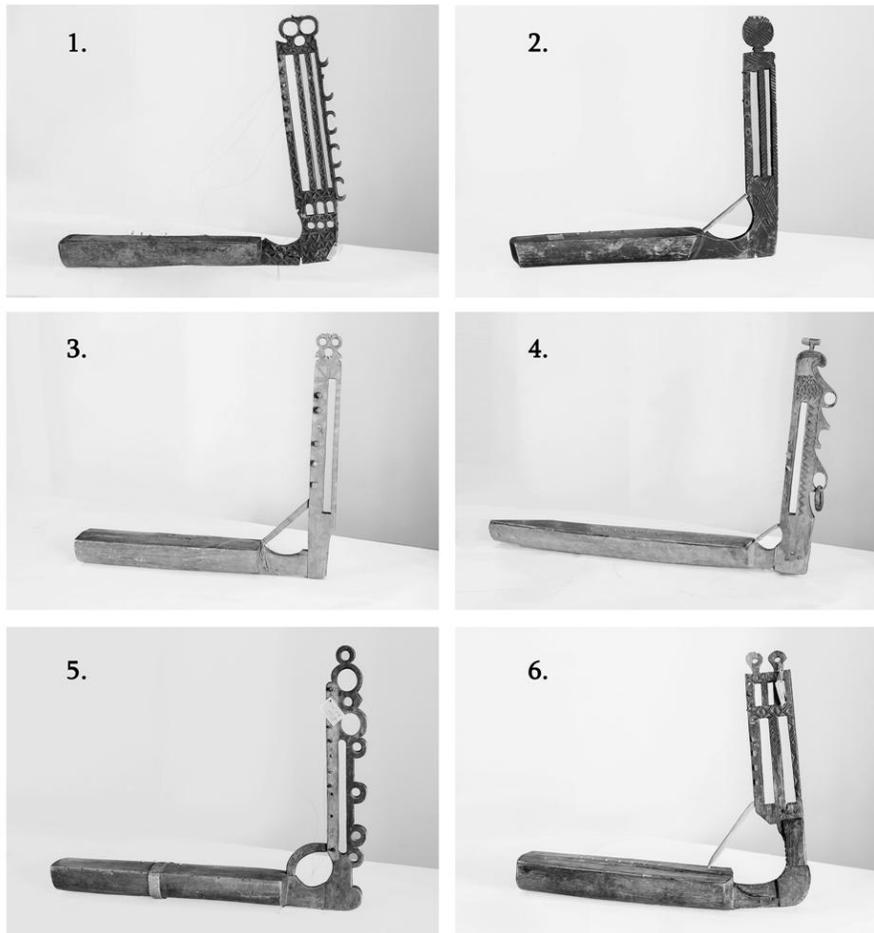


Figure 1–6: Georgian (Svan) Changs (copyright The Georgian National Museum).

According to the written sources, up until the medieval period, the *changi* was very common across Georgia. A bronze statue found in archeological excavations of the Kazbegi treasure collection, now in the Georgian National Museum, dated to the sixth century BCE, points to the ancient use of this musical instrument in the Caucasus. The statue itself represents a composition; a bell has a suspension ring on which there is a ram's head and standing on one horn of the ram is the figure of a man holding a musical instrument (Figure 7). This musical instrument apparently belongs to the harp type, but it is stylized and thus some scholars believe it to be a *changi* (Sh. Amiranashvili, D. Alavidze), while others believe it is a lyre (A. Talgren, Gr. Chkhikvadze, D. Janelidze). The statue appears to depict a ritual and the ceremony seems to be the scene of animal sacrifice at a cultic celebration day. The statue is believed to be a local product.

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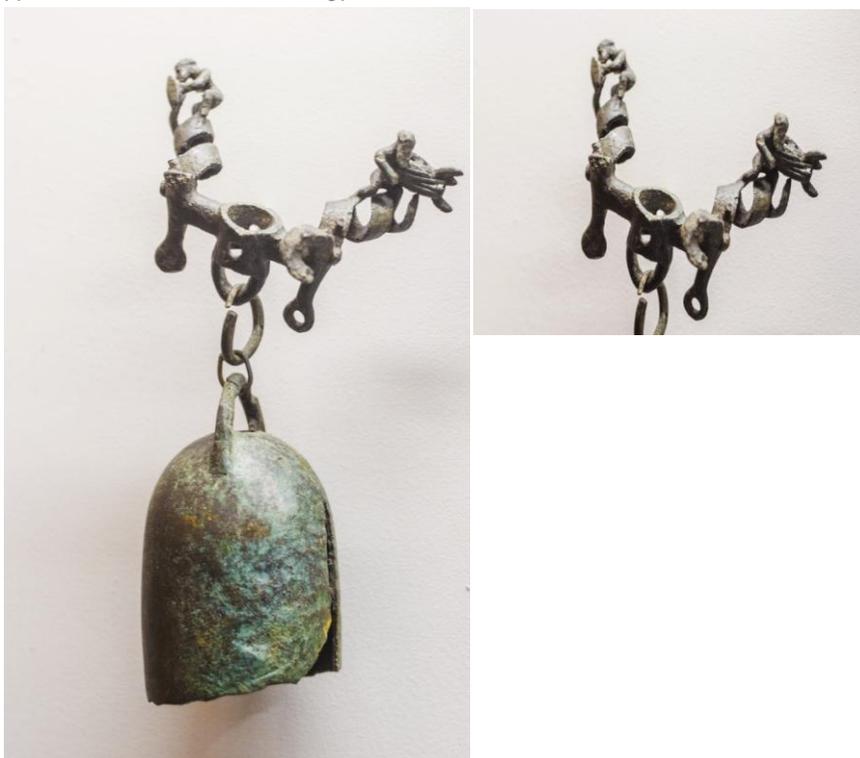


Figure 7–8: The Kazbegi treasure, 6th century BC (copyright The Georgian National Museum).

C. Sachs considers the harps discovered in Ur (2700 BCE) as analogues of the Georgian *change*; they were decorated with the figurines of two horses and an ox, which were made mobile by means of metal springs (Sachs 1937). In Georgia it was common to attach mobile figurines to other musical instruments too, e.g. to the *panduri* (Shilakadze 1970, 55).

The close and long-lasting historical and cultural links between the ancestors of the Georgians and the ancient population of Southwest Asia, as well as the genetic relations between these two groups, are supported not only by the constructional similarities of the musical instruments but also by the common names of these instruments (Shilakadze 1970, 57).

Two legends of how the *changi* originated were recorded in Svaneti and Kakheti (another region of Georgia). According to the legends, an old man whose child had died invented the *changi*. The body of the *changi* is the elbow of the youngster, and the strings are the hair. The sad sounds of the *changi* con-

vey the weeping of the old man (Kargareli 1933, 115). Two terms denoting the Georgian harp type instrument are still preserved: *changi* (from 10th century until now, from Persian *chank*) and *shimekvshe* (the local, Svanetian name, meaning “flexed arm” and connected to the Caucasian legend of the origin of this instrument). As the Georgian researchers agree, the term *changi* is a Persian loanword. In Persian, *chank* means psalm-accompanying instrument or lyre. *Chang* and *chank* in Persian, in their turn, are borrowed from Sumerian and Babylonian (ancient Assyrian) languages (Shilakadze 1970, 57).

Description and manufacture

The *changi* consists of the body and auxiliary parts. The body incorporates the soundbox and the neck, with sometimes a handle at the joint between the two. The soundbox or horizontal part is made of a piece of hollowed wood. A four mm thick soundboard (or “belly”) is then attached to the horizontal base. The sound holes are made in the soundboard. As the local oral tradition goes (attested by the exhibits that we possess), the vertical and horizontal parts must be joined at a right angle.

The auxiliary parts of the *changi* include tuning pegs, a little wooden stick (the handle) connecting the vertical and horizontal parts, wooden nails, and strings.

Coniferous trees are usually used to manufacture the soundbox of the *changi* (namely, spruce, pine, fir). For the neck, a very durable and hard wood (beech, maple) is selected. The tuning pegs are made specially of ash, because, as folk tradition explains, it takes a long time and effort for it to become loose. Horsehair was used for strings, and today nylon strings are substituted for this material. Some *changi* have paired strings, one coming from a tuning peg, passing into the body through a hole and the back up through the next hole to the next tuning peg; if there is an odd number of strings, the last string would be tied to a toggle under the soundboard. Other *changi* simply have the strings pinned to the soundboard.

Terminology

The Svans speak the Georgian and Svanetian languages, both of them belonging to the group of Kartvelian languages. The Svanetian language persists in the family and in everyday life situations. Song lyrics are also performed in Svanetian. Correspondingly, the terminology connected to the various parts of the *changi* exists in both the Georgian and the Svanetian languages (for example: body – *shik*, *karva*, *kolef*; neck – *mej*, *mekhar*, *kel*, *kint*; pegs – *chvint* (sing.), *chuntar* (pl.), *lachkhregal*, *chint* (sing.), *chkvarer* (pl.), *tkhvansk*; sound hole – *khuru*; bridge – *tse*, *tselood* (donkey), *chaajild*, *tskhenuka* (horse); strings – *jil*, *jilar*, *dzua*). The names of the strings correspond to the numerals

denoting order: *first*, *second*, *third*, etc. Counting begins from the shortest string.

Performance

The *changi* is played in the sitting position. The soundbox lies upon the knees of the performer in such a manner that its vertical part, the neck, stands furthest from his body. The performer holds the base of the neck or the handle with the left hand and rests the right elbow or forearm upon the horizontal part. Sound is produced by plucking with the fingers of the right hand. Usually, the strings are plucked with the finger pads (in the bottom part of the strings, close to the soundboard); also, it is possible to use the thumb of the left hand, whether with the pad or the nail. The latter use determines a considerable part of the colouristic play on the *changi*. Plucking the strings with the thumb of the left hand occurs on the last semi-quaver of a crotchet, after playing a broken 1–4–5 chord or triphony (“Georgian trichord”) on the first beat of the bars. It always conveys the highest note of the broken chord. A good performer will seldom play without using this method, though it is not used constantly throughout the whole tune. In modern ensemble practice this method is often omitted, which impoverishes the sonorousness of the musical instrument. Each string producing harmonic steps is played by means of the thumb of the right hand playing the base note, and the other remaining fingers (except for the little finger) play the higher notes. In the published articles or manuscript sources, the performing techniques for the *changi* are not indicated, though it is possible to indicate them as easily as for the classical harp.

Musical characteristics

The tunes performed on the *changi* utilize ancient harmonic patterns typical of the traditional Georgian polyphonic system. In various samples, we encounter three main harmonic variants: I VII I, I VII VI VII I and I VII VI V VI VII I. As we can see, adding strings to the musical instrument occurs at the expense of the addition of the low steps (which also confer harmonic functionality). Pairs or single strings are mainly played on the *changi*. A good player would only very rarely pluck three strings at a time. Mainly, chords are performed in broken form.

The *changi* can have from six to nine strings, although Georgian scholarly literature describes the *changi* having from ten to 13 strings (Arakishvili, Akhobadze, Shilakadze and others). Yet, as I have ascertained, no more than nine strings are necessary to play the traditional Svanetian repertoire. Within the scope of one sample, no more than eight strings are generally utilized. It is natural to ask “why?”. As my research has revealed, more than eight strings are necessary for the ability of *changi* ng register without retuning the instrument, i.e. the ability of transposition, which is necessary when matching this instru-

ment with the *chuniri* (a Svanetian three-stringed upright fiddle commonly played together with the *changi*). It is possible to transpose tunes on the *chuniri*, as well as on other bowed instruments, upwards or downwards by a second, also without the need of retuning of the instrument, just by *changi* ng the positions. If one tune begins from A and uses a I VII VI VII I harmonic progression, it is also possible to transpose the same tune without the retuning of the instrument (simply changing position one string downward) and to start it from the G note, keeping the I VII I harmonic steps.

As distinct from the other Georgian musical instruments, the *changi* strings completely reflect the seven-eight note range of sounds of the mode. The tuning of the musical instrument depends on the number of strings (for six strings, f, g, a, h, c₁, d₁; if *changi* has seven strings, then e₁ will be added to the previous list; if *changi* has eight strings, then fis₁ will be added as the eighth tone). In a tempered arrangement, transposition of a tune downwards by one major second would cause a *change* in the mode (major instead of minor). Yet, in this case, the strings are arranged in such a way that the entire tune sounds one major second lower, too. This is because the tuning of the *changi* reflects the seven-eight note original sound range of Georgian folk music. According to one of the studies of the Georgian modal arrangement, the distances between the steps of the mode are evenly heptatonic and fall within 170–175 cents. The study relied upon 30 years of practice and computerised research. Based on the data collected as a result of measurement of many samples, researchers concluded that this equally distanced sound range is a common Georgian one. The researchers have applied the system to many Georgian chants and songs, which have yielded amazing results; the samples were astoundingly close to their original source (audio samples recorded from the traditional performers many years ago). The principle of transposition of the *changi* one major second downwards without the rearrangement of its strings supports the above-mentioned theory.

Function of the instrument in traditional life

In Svanetian everyday life, two musical instruments, the *changi* and the *chuniri*, are of sacral importance and possess a considerable religious and ritual value. Traditionally, families who sing and perform on musical instruments receive the special respect of the entire Georgian village. Whether they can actually play or not, the families still possess the musical instruments, keep them in the specially selected place and painstakingly care for them.

In the Svanetian tradition, the *changi* is incorporated into the ensemble with the *chuniri*. As a rule of thumb, playing begins with the bowed musical instrument; after several chords, the *changi* joins it, and after the instrumental introduction, the vocal part begins. The *changi* mainly carries the accompanying function, yet solo instrumental tunes occur too, if rarely. Transcriptions of triphonic Svanetian songs are mainly performed on this instrument. With the ac-

companiment of the *changi* and the *chuniri*, both three-part songs and unison historical and heroic songs are performed. Both men and women play the *changi*, though men tend to dominate. On the one hand, just like the *chuniri*, the *changi* is regarded as a mourning instrument, possessing a sorrowful sound, but on the other hand, these musical instruments are an integral part of joyful events. Yet, mainly, the *changi* is played to alleviate sorrow.

According to the oral tradition of narrators, in ancient times the *changi* and the *chuniri* were an inseparable part of family music-making and represented the preferred form of amusement. Additionally, the *changi* and the *chuniri* had the function of treatment in rituals devoted to persons who were ill with smallpox or measles and other viral diseases. The traditional performers believed that the sounds of the musical instruments helped those taken ill in their convalescence. Using stringed musical instruments to treat smallpox is a common practice in Georgia, and this tradition is still alive. As one tradition goes, musical instruments used to be hung on the wall near the bed of the diseased person so that the spirits of the afflicting “Lords” could play them at night. The *changi* was played at children’s bedtimes, too. In Svaneti, mourning a dying person with a musical instrument has also been documented. It could be the realisation of the wish of either the performer or the dying person himself.

The use of the *changi* and the *chuniri* in rituals connected with the cult of the dead is quite special, namely, during “Lifanali”. Of all the Kartvelian tribes, this ritual was observed only among the Svans. This is a New Year celebration, connected with the idea of renaissance of the forces of nature. It lasts for several days. One of its requirements is to play musical instruments to amuse the spirits:

“During the whole night no one would sleep except the children. The wood would be added constantly to the fireplace in order to strengthen the fire so that the spirits would not be cold. At the same time, the oldest member of the family as well as good connoisseurs of tales would recite ancient stories and fairytales to the spirits, as it was believed that the spirits liked the fairytales. At the same time, the spirits would be amused by the playing on the *chianuri* [another name for the *chuniri*] and the *changi*. Such an amusement of the spirits would take place each evening during the *Lifanali*” (Shilakadze 1970, 63).

The second very important ritual, also connected with the cult of the dead, is that of “bringing the spirit” or “catching the spirit”. The Svans believe that if anyone dies outside the family, his or her soul remains at the place of demise. After the body is taken home, they take care to bring the soul home, too, going to the place of death. The mourners, dressed in white, are followed by three-four singers, who take musical instruments with them (*chuniri*, *changi*), as well as some food, three candles and a rooster. When the rooster stops at a spot and starts making different sounds, this signifies that it has “caught the soul”. Then the rooster returns to the family. In the process of marching towards the home, the singers mainly sing *Tsmidao Ghmerto* (*The Holy God*) and play the musical instruments. Initially, they attach a rope three-four meters long to the rooster,

and then release it. After the rooster approaches the corpse, no more weeping is allowed. The rooster then walks as a human being, does not fear people, is often given food, and can be caressed by anyone without running away. People talk to it as to the one who died. It can walk where it wishes (next to the dead person). After the ceremony, the rooster is kept in a cage and killed on the 40th day after the death. Not everyone can “bring the soul”; such a person should be a good connoisseur of songs and playing. According to one interlocutor, Vakhtang Pilpani, his father, Islam Pilpani, has brought up to 50 souls to their homes by playing the musical instruments and singing chants. If the dead body could not be found or if he/she was already buried in a foreign land, then the soul of the dead one would be considered to be moved into the rooster and the mourners would weep for it as for the dead one.

Repertoire

The tunes played on the *changi* have one intonational basis, though the songs are distinguished by the sets of themes. The performance of epic narrative text of the ballad type is especially popular, reiterating couplets many times. The principal repertoire belongs to the ritual genre, including mourning, heroic, lullaby songs and tunes as well as the instrumental transcriptions of chants.

Conclusion

I have tried to represent the peculiarities of the harp type musical instrument, widespread throughout much of the world ever since ancient times, in the Georgian musical case. The local legends, technology of manufacture, terminology, the social function of this instrument in the ancient traditional rituals, and its sacral importance for the Svans points to the long-lasting local tradition of this instrument.

The Svans stand out by their special loyalty towards their culture and their traditions. Even ecomigrants, who moved to the lowlands of Georgia from the Svanetian mountains, have preserved the ancient habits and rules, dances, songs and instrumental tunes with special love over scores of years. Still, the number of performers on the traditional musical instruments has diminished considerably in the last few decades. The tradition is mainly kept by the families of traditional singers. The *changi* is an inseparable part of traditional Svanetian life and being, and up until now, along with the *chuniri*, this musical instrument remains an important source of self-identification for the Svans.

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Нино Размадзе

Грузијска *чанги*

Јединствена култура Грузија, смештена на раскршћу Европе и Азије, формирана је у односу с другим културним центрима. Инструментална музика је била прилично развијена у старој Грузији, а овде ће бити представљен велики број музичких инструмената, о којима ћемо расправљати на основу писаних споменика, фресака и археолошких података.

Овај чланак се бави групом грузијских жичаних инструмената или, прецизније, инструмената сличних харфи, који су распрострањени у неким земљама северног и централног Кавказа. То су: грузијска *чанги*, абхаска *ајума*, кабардинска *пишна декваква*, карачајска *тшедекваква*, балкаријски *кил-кобуз/канир кобуз* и осетијски *дуадастанон*. Од претходно поменутих, грузијска *чанги* је опстала само у Сванетији, једној од грузијских планинских области. О старости и непрекинутој локалној традицији *чанги* сведоче глинене и бронзане фигурине (6. век п. н. е.), откривене археолошким ископавањима. *Чанги* се помиње у грузијским писаним изворима који потичу из 5. века и из периода од 10. до 20. столећа. Постојала су два термина која су се односила на грузијски инструмент сличан харфи: *чанги* (од 10. века до данас, на персијском *чанк*) и *шимеквше* (локално сванетијско име, са значењем „савијена рука“, повезано са кавкаском легендом о пореклу инструмента). Сматра се да је *кнари* био инструмент који је више личио на лиру, него на харфу.

Курт Сакс сматра да су харфе откривене у Уру (2700. п. н. е.) аналогне грузијској *чанги*, а биле су декорисане фигуринама два коња и вола. Овај чланак се дотиче места *чанги* у грузијском инструментаријуму, традиције музичких ансамбала, друштвене функције и сакралног значења, броја жица, звука и извођачких могућности.

Кључне речи: *чанги*, грузијски музички инструменти, харфа, лира, Сванетија, Грузија.