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THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN THE TRANSMISSION
OF GEORGIAN CHANT

The 20th century witnessed the degradation of many oral traditions around the world, unfortunately including the master tradition of three-voice liturgical singing in the Georgian Orthodox Church.[1] Three of the very last master chanters, already in their advanced age, were recorded by Vladimer Akhobadze, leader of the Tbilisi Conservatoire expedition in 1949. After recording chant examples, the masters were asked how many chants they could actually sing:

"Now that I'm thinking about it," said   famous folk singer Varlam Simonishvili, "I can recall about 350 [chants]. But you, dear Artem, must know many more, don't you?"

"About 2500," Artem Erkomaishvili replied.

Turning to the third chanter, Dimitri Patarava, Simonishvili asked: "In any case Dimitri, you must certainly remember more than we do, because when we were apprentices, you were a thorough recorder of the 'cribs' [of these hymns]."

At these words Dimitri Patarava produced a thickish pocket book and said to the head of the expedition, Vladimir Akhobadze, "if you allow me to use this little book, I can sing about 3500 chants for you…."(Shugliashvili, 2004:XVII)[2]

Considering that the difficulty of these 1-3 minute chants ranges from simple triadic responsorials to complex, multi-phrase chants of the *troparia, kondakia,* and *heirmoi* genres, it is hard to imagine learning such a repertoire aurally and maintaining it mnemonically.[3] Short of simply asking one of the masters how such a large repertoire was maintained in memory, scholarly attention has focused on a large collection of chant notation transcribed at the turn of the 19th -20th centuries.[4]

 A number of fascinating discoveries have emerged since these archival documents became available for intensive study in the late 1980s, such as the sheer number of surviving chant transcriptions, stylistic and harmonic differences between regional chant school repertories, and the presence of both very simple and highly complex variations of the same chant. Since to date no pre-19th century pedagogical or theoretical chant treatises have been found in Georgia, the key to understanding the impressive knowledge of the master chanters must lie in these transcriptions. To begin with, we must examine the categorization systems used to organize the repertory with the goal of elucidating the role that human memory exercised on the maintenance of Georgian chant over a multi-generational period.

Evidence from early chant treatises in Byzantium and Western Europe give some tantalizing clues to how chant transmission may have progressed in Georgia. For example, several pages from the Vatican Organum Treatise, an early pedagogical text on Parisian organum from the 1210s-1230s, demonstrate a variety of ways to teach two-part cadences to students (ex. 1 and 2) (Busse-Berger, 2005:119).[5] The variations above the tenor melodic line describe the movement from one fixed interval to another, in this case, the octave to the fifth degree above the melody. To accomplish this, certain extra-musical information is also necessary: 1. the lower voice must have an indication of how many beats the upper voice variation will last in order to know when to cadence properly; 2. conversely, the upper voice must have prior knowledge of the melody in order to anticipate the correct cadencing pitch. Because the duration of the improvised upper voice could have been indicated in other ways, such as by a choir director, the tenor voice didn't necessarily need to memorize it previously. But without prior knowledge of the tenor melody, the two-voiced realization is impossible, especially as the tenor melody becomes more complicated.[6]

Some of the earliest evidence for Georgian multi-voice chanting occurs in the 11th century, at least 200 years before the dating of the Vatican Organum Treatise (Sukhiashvili, 2006). Describing the famous Georgian-Athonite hymnographer Giorgi Mtatsmideli (1009-1065), his discale Gioergi Mtsire relates that "young Giorgi quickly and easily memorized the 'harmonization of the voices' (*Shetsqobileba*) to the chant melodies" (Giorgi Mtsire, 1978:72). Basing on a song which tells abaut *shetsqobileba* of bass part when singing Javakhishvili concludes that in the chants this term denoted harmonization of voices (Javakhishvili, 1990:300). Besides being one of the earliest references to Christian multi-voice chant, this quote assists scholars interested in the pedagogy and transmission of chant. It appears that chanters engaged in a two-step process: first they learned specific melodies, and second they learned to harmonize these melodies.

The creation of a "memory archive" of model melodies (postulated by Mary Carruthers) facilitated the organization of essential structural information, upon which could be built an entire repertory of harmonized and ornamented variations. Paolo Ferretti, building on research pioneered by Francois-Augustus Gevaert in the 1880s, identified three types of model melodies (Levy, 1998), which may be helpful in understanding different types of observable melodies in Georgian chant: *centos*, original melodies, and prototype melodies. The first type, *centos,* are described as well-known melodic fragments that may be borrowed for use in other chants. For example, see a comparison of one such musical phrase found in multiple Gregorian chants (ex. 3) (ibid).

As nearly the entire Georgian repertory may be understood to be structured on a library of stock phrases (*mukhli*), this type of phrase-borrowing is very common. Similarly, an entire stock phrase may be borrowed from another chant and inserted into another chant for lengthening purposes (phrase sung to a open vowel), or sim-

ply added to cadences for ornamental value. Example 4 demonstrates how a simple "Amin" in the Georgian repertory is lengthened with a stock phrase in this manner.

The other two types of chant melodies identified by Ferretti include a class of "original melodies" that are set to a single text, and "prototype melodies," which are canonical melodic templates which can be adapted for new texts. In Georgia, "original melodies" are observed in the uniquely assigned (*tvitkhmovani*) model melodies for chants such as *Romelni Kerubimta* and *Kriste Aghsdga* (Karbelashvili P.,1899), while "prototype melodies" clearly resemble the melodic phrases assigned to individual modes within the Georgian Oktoechos. Scholar Kenneth Levy has further linked "prototype melodies" with the Byzantine *automela-prosomoia* chant forms, which are also melodies that can be adapted to new texts. These melodies were so well known that "it was sufficient to identify the model by its text-incipit (first two words) and supply the fresh text" (Levy, 1998:174). Interestingly, this type of adaptable, "prototype melody" became the cornerstone for the organization and transmission of liturgical chant in Georgia.

Any discussion of the role of memory in transmission must examine the salient categorization systems. The organization of Georgian chant is centered around a unique Oktoechos (Eight-Mode) system,[7] which determines the melodic templates for the *troparia*, *kondakia*, *heirmoi*, and other chant genres). For example, a student who mastered just six or seven melodic phrases pre-assigned to the Tone 4 *troparia* genre would be able to adapt and sing dozens of different texts to these melodies. Example 5 is an sample of one Tone 4 *troparia* chant, *dghes tskhovrebisa*,[8] with each melodic phrase numbered according to Davit Shugliashvili's categorization 1 - 6, with F-finale (Shugliashvili, 1991). Example 6 shows a reduction of the structural chords of the Tone 4 *troparia* melodic phrases.

From these examples, the three-voiced structure of the chant becomes apparent, however it is still unclear which elements of the chant were memorized, and which elements were improvised. In order to establish the primacy of the top voice as the structural core of Georgian chant, example 7 compares the 2nd and 3rd voice-parts from several chants from the Gelati Monastery, focusing on the 3rd melody from the Tone 4 *troparia* genre of the Oktoechos (compare examples 5, 6, 7, and 8). The vertical lines in example 7 indicate moments of pitch consensus between the phrase variants,[9] and suggests the presence of a pre-conceived harmonic structure.

However, the same chant example from other regions of Georgia displays harmonic structures that differ widely from the Gelati Monastery variants shown in example 7. Example 8 demonstrates these startling differences in harmonization by comparing a three-voiced realisation of the Gelati Monastery 3rd phrase example with the same chant phrase as it is found in the geographically distinct Shemokmedi Monastery School and the Kartl-Kakhuri Mode, respectively.[10] As is well-known, these examples reiterate the observation that the first-voice melodies appear to have been transmitted intact across diverse regions over several centuries, the lower voice parts were more susceptible to local harmonic variation.[11]

Pilimon Koridze,[12] who authored the majority of the surviving Georgian chant transcriptions, observed that "new pupils initially learned *damtskebi* ("beginner" voice) in a process called *sastsavlebeli khmebi* (study-voices), then learned *bani* (bass) and *modzakhili* (middle voice). The *modzakhili* voice followed the melody a fifth below, while the *bani* voice followed the melody an octave below."(Shugliashvili, 2006). Looking to the example of the Vatican Organum Treatise, it is possible to speculate that the Georgian first-voice *damtskebi* melody served a similar function to the organum tenor, whereby students learned to create harmonizations and variations based on their prior knowledge of a fixed model melody (Ositashvili, 1983) .

Given the points discussed so far, it seems appropriate to imagine a basic task of the master chanter trade. What skills would have been necessary in order to set a new *troparia* text to three-voiced Georgian liturgical music? At first, one imagines, the text would have been divided into phrase-length segments. Then, it would have been assigned to a category, in this case, one of the eight modes of the Oktoechos. Following, a master chanter would have been expected to:

1. Remember the correct first-voice model melodies of the assigned Oktoechos Mode;

2. Choose a sequence of model melodies;

3. Set the text to this sequence of melodies, i.e. choose points of cadence, recitative, and melody;

4. Employ the regionalized skill of *shetsqobileba*, i.e. harmonization in three voices;

5. Employ the regionalized skills of variation and ornamentation to beautify the chant.

The only step requiring mnemonic function is the retrieval of the model melodies in the top voice. Otherwise, three chanters skilled in the arts of harmonization, ornamentation, and text-setting could hypothetically "sight-sing" a brand new text directly into complex three-voiced Georgian polyphony.

The skill of variation, the fifth item on the list, is arguably one of the most essential components of the oral tradition. According to Pilimon Koridze, "*gamshvenebuli kilo* chant ("colorful mode") is an elaboration of *namdvili kilo* chant (simple mode) and consists of the independent and orderly ornamentation of each voice" (Shugliashvili, 2006) (ex. 9). Such variation and ornamentation allowed singers to employ their own creativity and did not require precise mnemonic recall. In addition, variation served the purpose of constantly reaffirming the memorized structural core of each model melody.

In summary, the medieval Georgian practice of *shetsqobileba* associated with Giorgi Mtatsmideli and the 19th century pedagogical technique of *sastsavlebeli khmebi* described by Pilimon Koridze refer to the harmonization of a series of pre-learned model melodies. The oral transmission of such a large number of chants by masters such as Simonishvili, Patarava, and Erkomaishvili was possible through the use of adaptable, prototype melodies, which to a lesser degree are also found in early European and Byzantine sources. It is observed that the first-voice melodies remained

relatively stable across diverse regions of Georgia, while the three-voiced harmonic structures varied widely. This suggests that while both were to some extent memorized, the first voice commanded a dominant mnemonic function in the transmission of chant. The lower voice parts, not serving as an important function in the transmission of chant, were therefore susceptible to the aesthetics local folk-music.

In short, the existence of a highly developed oral chant tradition in Georgia as recently as the turn of the last century is a treasure trove for comparative study, and has the potential to contribute significantly to international scholarship on oral transmission and chant studies.

Notes

[1] The author would like to acknowledge the many hours of help with the Georgian translation of this article (Ekaterine Diasamidze), and assistance with the preparation of the musical examples (Nino Razmadze).

[2] Dialogue quoted from Samuel Toidze, "Leninis drosha," June 10, 1981, Tbilisi. Republished in t Shugliashvili, 2004; Patarava's notebook was full of liturgical texts marked with his own   "neumatic" notation.

[3] As a point of comparison, students at the Tbilisi based School of Chant and Folklore can sing on average about 40-50 *troparia* and *heirmoi* chants as well as the basic set of 50 liturgy chants, according to Zurab Gogoladze, (Interview, March 29th, 2008). However, the extent that these chants are known by heart, in all three voices, is questionable considering the dependency on modern music notation.

[4] Approximately 8,000 chant transcriptions in various degrees of completeness were notated in western five-line staff notation by figures such as Pilimon Koridze, Razhden Khundadze, Ekvtime Kereselidze, and Vasil Karbelashvili, and are currently housed in the National Centre of Manuscripts, Tbilisi, Georgia.

[5]   For mnemonic purposes, these types of treatises were written in rhyme. They were also organized using exhaustive tables of repetitive examples, all aimed at memorization and strong cross-referencing for mental mapping.

[6] Though contained in a written source, scholars Anna Maria Busse-Berger (2005) and Mary Carruthers (1990) have argued that these examples (and most other pre-16th century music theory manuals) represent a pedagogical method related to an active oral chant tradition in the West, and were not written as a substitution for memorization. They contend that the exhaustive repetitiveness of the examples is a clear indicator that the book was written either as a pedagogical reference for teachers, or as a variation manual for students.

[7] The Oktoechos system first appears in the 8th century and has been attributed to John of Damascene or his environs in Syria. It became useful as a way to organize chants in many Christian chant repertories including the Latin West, Byzantium, West Syrian, Coptic,

Armenian, and Georgian. The Georgian Oktoechos differs from nearby systems (Byzantine) in that it composed of melodic fragments rather than scale arrangements of cadential patterns.

[8] *dghes tskhovrebisa* ("Today is the Crown"), from the service for the Anunciation of Mary, March 25th .

[9] One notices that in the 3rd voice figurations, several structural moments seem to bear two different notes (C or F; D or G). This indicates that the 3rd voice can harmonize the melody in either fifths or octaves, which is just one of the many possible variations for the 3rd voice.

[10] The Gelati Monastery is located in central Georgia and was a medieval center for the dissemination of Georgian chant (see Magda Sukhiashvili, Malkhaz Erkvanidze). Through the centuries, almost every region in Georgia developed its own unique style of Georgian chant, usually centered around an important monastic academy. Only three of these monastic traditions survive in transcription, the vast majority representing the Gelati Monastery chant school. The other extant samples represent the Kartl-Kakhuri regional mode in Eastern Georgia as transmitted by the Karbelashvili family; and the Shemokmedi Monastery School in Guria, Western Georgia as transmitted by the Dumbadze family.

[11] Note for example the parallel 5th and 9th intervals in the lower voices, as well as contrary motion, in the Shemokmedi Monastery School sample. These traits resemble the highly active 3rd voice, and the predominance of 2nd, 5th, 7th, and 9th intervals between voice parts found in Western Georgian folk music. By contrast, the 3rd voice maintains a simplistic parallel octave motion in the Kartl-Kakhuri sample similar to the drone bass found in Eastern Georgian folk music. These differences must have emerged over several centuries due to the political instability in Georgia following the 13th century Mongol invasions.

[12] Pilimon Koridze (1835-1911), a famous opera singer, spent the last thirty years of his life transcribing nearly five thousand chants into western notation. He worked with famous master chanters including Anton Dumbadze, Razhden Khundadze, Ivliane Tsereteli, Dimitri Chalaganidze, and others.

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მაგალითი 1. ვატიკანის „ორგანუმ ტრაქტატის" ნიმუში, ვატიკანი, სამოციქულო ბიბლიოთეკა, Ottab. Lat. 3025, foglio 46r. (გადმობეჭდილია ანა მარია ბუსსე ბერგერისგან ავტორის ნებართვით)

Example 1. Vatican *Organum Treatise* example, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ottab. lat. 3025, folio 46r. (reprinted from Anna Maria Busse Berger, 2005, with permission of the author)

მაგალითი 2. ვატიკანის „ორგანუმ ტრაქტატის" ნიმუში, ვატიკანი, სამოციქულო ბიბლიოთეკა, Ottab. Lat. 3025, foglio 46r. (გადმობეჭდილია ანა მარია ბუსსე ბერგერისგან ავტორის ნებართვით).

Example 2. Vatican *Organum Treatise* example, Vatican City, Ottab. lat. 3025, folio 46r. ã Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (reprinted from Anna Maria Busse Berger, 2005, with permission of the author).
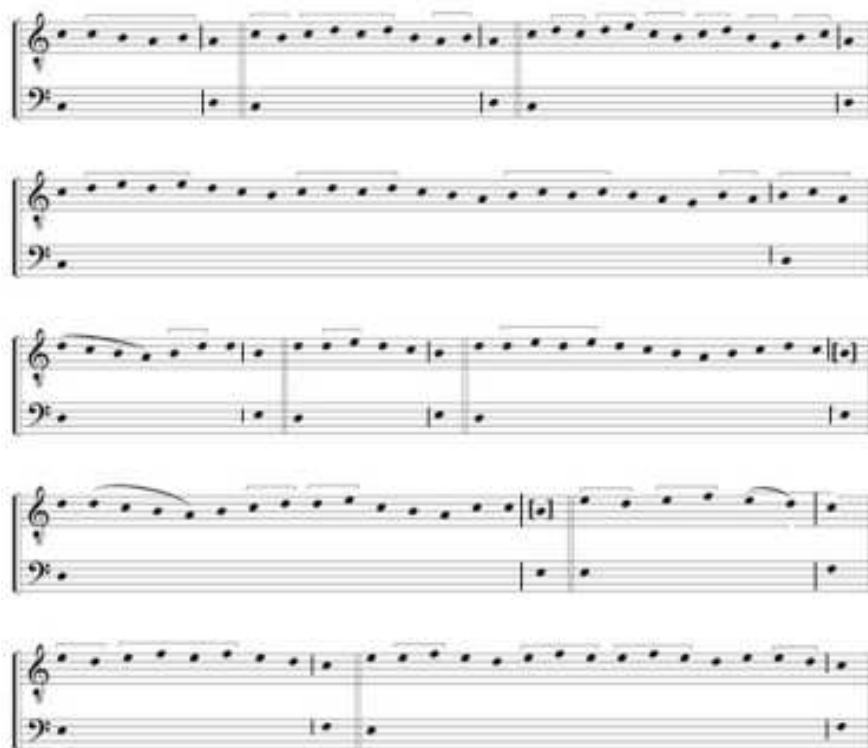
მაგალითი 3. გრეგორისეული საგალობლის ნიმუშები (გადმობეჭდილია ლევისგან, გვ211, 1998).
Example 3. Gregorian chant *centonate* examples, Dom Cardine (reprinted from Levy, p. 211, 1998)

მაგალითი 4. „ამინ". ქართული ჭრელის ნიმუში (ნასესხები მელოდია)
Example 4. *Amin.* example of Georgian *chreli* (borrowed melody)

მაგალითი 5. „დღეს ცხოვრებისა", მე-4 ხმის ტროპარი, მელოდიების ნიმუშით 1-6, + F (ფინალი)
Example 5. *Dghes tskhovrebisa*, Tone 4 *troparia* chant, with model melodies marked 1-6, +F (final)

მაგალითი 6. ძირითადი მე4 ხმის შემცირება. ტროპარის ნიმუში (ქართული რვა ხმის სისტემა. გელათის სკოლა)

Example 6. Reduction of the basic Tone 4 *troparia* template (Georgian Oktoechos, Gelati Monastery School)
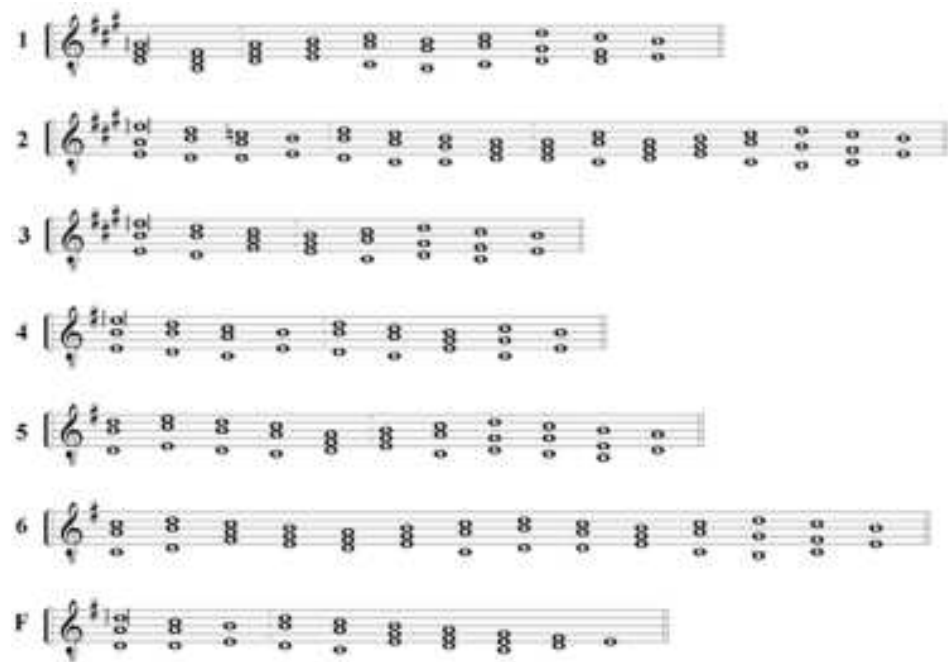
მაგალითი 7. 5 საგალობლის მესამე ფრაზის შედარება. (4 ხმის ტროპარი) მეორე ხმა; შემდეგ – მესამე ხმა.

Example 7. Five chant comparison of Phrase 3 (Tone 4 *troparia*). 2nd voice, then 3rd voice

მაგალითი 8. 4 ხმის ტროპარის „დღეს ცხოვრებისა" მესამე ფრაზის შედარება სამი რეგიონული სკოლის ნიმუშებში
Example 8. Phrase 3 (Tone 4 *troparia*) from *dghes tskhovrebisa*, comparison of three regional chant school variants

ა) გელათის მონასტრის სკოლა (ფილიმონ ქორიძე)
a) Gelati Monastery School (Pilimon Koridze)

ბ) შემოქმედის მონასტრის სკოლა (არტემ ერქომაიშვილი)
b) Shemokmedi Monastery School (Artem Erkomaishvili)

გ) ქართლ-კახური სკოლა (ვასილ კარბელაშვილი)
c) Kartl-Kakhuri School (Vasil Karbelashvili)

მაგალითი 9. სადა და გამშვენებული ფრაზის ვარიანტების შედარება (ქართული)
Example 9. 1. Comparison of simple vs. ornamented phrase variants (Georgian)

ა) გელათის მონასტრის სკოლა (ფილიმონ ქორიძე)
a) Gelati Monastery School (Pilimon Koridze)

ბ) შემოქმედის მონასტრის სკოლა (არტემ ერქომაიშვილი)
b) Shemokmedi Monastery School (Artem Erkomaishvili)