

Georgian Traditional Polyphony in Comparative Studies: History and Perspectives

• Comparative studies: Completing the circle or gradually increasing?

The development of the scholarly study of traditional music for the last 120 years is usually summarized as a strategic shift from comparative studies (1884 – 1940) to deep regional studies of separate traditions (after 1945). The last few years have been marked by several attempts to revive comparative studies in Europe and America: publication of the book “The Origins of Music” (2000 by MIT Press) resurrected such themes as music universals and music origin theories; in 2001 the ICTM World Conference in Rio de Janeiro discussed the possible comeback of the comparative method as the first theme of the conference; in 2006 the journal “World of Music” published a comparative article by Victor Grauer on the early history of music in human evolution with commentaries from a few scholars; and my own book on the origins of choral singing (2006) was mostly based on the comparative method. These attempts to revive the comparative method in ethnomusicology is bringing the development of ethnomusicology to the point of completing the first “full circle”.

Well, it would be naïve to think that the development of ethnomusicology strictly followed the trends outlined above. For example, according to the history of the study of my native Georgian traditional music, a study of regional traditions has been paramount for Georgian scholarship since the 1860s. The same can be said about the history of the study of traditional music in Russia, where research of regional traditions also dominated. The same was true in the Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Lithuania, Portugal, Greece, Bulgaria, Canada and in many other countries of the world. As a matter of fact, if counted summarily, comparative works, coming mostly from the representatives of the great Berlin school of comparative musicology during the first half of the 20th century, were in a huge minority compared with the many hundreds of regional studies conducted by native scholars, and published in an array of different languages in the same period.

Paradoxically, since WW2, after the establishment of the so-called new non-comparative paradigm in ethnomusicology, national scholars, on the contrary, expressed more interest in comparative studies. In Georgia, for example, few books containing comparative studies were published after the 1980s (Gvacharia & Tabagua, 1983; Maisuradze, 1989, Jordania, 1989, 2006). In Russian and Ukrainian scholarship comparative studies of the Slavonic world also became more important from the 1960s

(for example, monographic studies by Rubtsov, 1962; Goshovsky, 1968, Zemtsovsky, 1975, 1987). If we try to summarize the gigantic output in ethnomusicological research throughout the world we will find that in most of the national scholarships of the world the share of comparative studies have actually increased after WW2. (Although we must remember that regional studies have always grossly prevailed in national scholarship).

Despite the possibility that many of my colleagues might agree with what I have just said, most of them would still reject seeing the history of the study of traditional music from other than a western perspective. This kind of Europecentrism, which in my 2006 book I called the “milk-drinking syndrome” reminds us how far we still are from objectively covering the wide gamut of research methods of world scholarship¹.

Therefore, the change of paradigm in the study of traditional music (from comparative to regional studies) was primarily a shift in western, Euro-American scholarship. For the majority of world countries comparative study has never been a leading method of study, and contrary to western ethnomusicology, the importance of comparative studies has been increasing since the 1950s.

It was natural that the study of so-called “non-European cultures”, that gave birth to comparative musicology, started by the representatives of big colonial powers, who could easily go and study their “own” colonized territories. As a matter of fact, colonial powers considered scholarly study of colonized territories as their responsibility. In a certain way, the old name of ethnomusicology – “Music History of non-European Cultures” - could be interpreted as “Music History of European Colonies” (see, for example, the array of works of British and French scholars in the colonized African regions, or the works of Russian scholars among the peoples of the former Russian Empire and the USSR). I consider that the unique international position of Germany (an ambitious central European power without colonies), prompted German scholars to start studying the whole world from a comparative perspective, often without any reliance on their own fieldwork materials.

• First attempts at a comparative study of Georgian polyphony

Not surprisingly, the first attempts at a comparative study of Georgian traditional polyphony was conducted by representatives of the great German school of comparative musicology (Nadel, 1933, Schneider, 1940). These attempts followed the first publications of Georgian traditional polyphonic songs made by German and Austrian scholars from Georgian war prisoners during the First World War (Lach, 1917, Schunemann, 1920). Nadel was the first to suggest that the emergence of European Medieval professional polyphony could have been the result of the influence of Georgian polyphony. In his review of Nadel’s book, Marius Schneider remarked that Nadel was “going too far” in his suggestions, but a few years later Schneider himself went even

¹ “Milk-drinking syndrome” stands for the Europecentristic phenomenon, when the European experience is extrapolated onto the whole world, although facts seen worldwide do not turn out to support the European point of view: until the 1960s it was generally believed that all human populations can drink and absorb milk. By the end of the 1970s it was found that almost all adult populations of the world could not absorb milk, with the exception of only North and partly Central Europeans. Worldwide charity missions had to change their food-providing strategies to most of the regions of the world. This remarkable and methodologically important fact, which teaches us to be cautious in extrapolating European experience onto other parts of the world, is still not widely known.

further, suggesting that Europe did receive the first impulses of polyphony from the Caucasus (Schneider was trying to avoid the use of the term “Georgian”, using instead the broader geographic term “Caucasian” and he was using materials from North Caucasian peoples. Schneider, 1940). In his subsequent publications Schneider remained loyal to his suggestion that Caucasian polyphony played a major role in turning European professional monophonic singing tradition into polyphony (1951, 1961, 1969). To keep historical records straight, we should also mention, that for Schneider (unlike Nadel) Caucasia was not a region where polyphony was “born” or “invented”. According to his approach to the origins of vocal polyphony, based on fabled “cultural circles”, vocal polyphony was first created somewhere in South-East Asia, and came to Georgia via Iran. Considering that there is hardly any vocal polyphony in Iran, Schneider’s historical reconstructions were at best weakly founded.

In 1956 a small article on the parallels between Georgian and Albanian polyphony was published by Erich Stockman. The article was very small (only two pages), was based on the superficial analysis of one Georgian and one Albanian example of three-part vocal polyphony, without any social or historical context. And still, for the first time Georgian traditional polyphony was compared with **traditional** polyphony from another culture (prior to this, Georgian traditional polyphony was analyzed in the context of the history of European **professional** polyphony).

For the biggest part of the development of Georgian musicology and ethnomusicology, there were no sizeable attempts to compare Georgian traditional polyphony with traditional polyphony from other regions. For example, in his 1925 book the founder of the scholarly study of Georgian traditional music Dimitri Araqishvili mentioned the presence of polyphony in medieval Great Britain (the well known information from the Giraldus Cambrensis from the end of 12th century), and in Russia, but without discussing these traditions in a comparative aspect. This was mostly due to the fact that most of the polyphonic traditions of the world were not known at the time. For example, listing the peoples of the USSR with the traditions of vocal polyphony, Shalva Aslanishvili mentions only Georgian, Russian, Ukrainian and Ossetian traditional music (Aslanishvili, 1954:3). It was a common phrase for Georgian musicologists to assert that Georgian polyphony was a “polyphonic island” in the “sea of monophonic cultures”. This trend changed from the 1980s, when a few publications, looking at the Georgian traditional polyphony in comparative perspective appeared (Gvacharia & Tabagua, 1983; Maisuradze, 1989, Tsitsishvili, 1990, 1991; see also Jordania, 1989, 2006).

Besides of the unique tradition of vocal polyphony, Georgia boasts of possibly one of the oldest languages of Europe (together with Basque and some North Caucasian languages). Studies in comparative linguistics of the Georgian language had been going on for more than a century before studies of Georgian polyphony even started. As a natural consequence, the results of linguistic studies had a tremendous influence on the comparative works of Georgian musicologists. So in some of their works scholars were trying to strictly follow the results of linguistic research:

(1) In their 1983 book “Basque Folk Songs” Vazha Gvacharia (linguist and musicologist) and Ilia Tabagua (linguist) compared Georgian and Basque musical traditions and polyphony. Their conclusion that Georgian and Basque musical traditions are very close to each other was mostly following the well-known (and still controversial)

linguistic hypothesis on the ancient relationship between the Georgian and Basque languages. As a matter of fact, Basque traditional polyphony bears major signs of the influence of late European professional polyphony (parallel thirds and sixths, European functional harmony, etc.), and has closer connections to Italian or Balkan “Europeanized” polyphonic traditions than to Georgian traditional polyphony. So called “western branch” of Georgian urban choral music is also close to Basque polyphony, but the reasons of this closeness does not go into the pre-Indo-European antiquity. So in terms of musical parallels, the polyphonic traditions of the Albanians (studied in the article by Erich Stockman) or Bulgarians (see Tsitsishvili, 1990, 1991) are much closer to Georgian polyphony than the polyphonic traditions of the Basques.

(2) In her 1989 book “Georgian Folk Music and its Historical-Ethnographic Aspects” Maisuradze studied links of Georgian polyphony in the context of Caucasus. There are truly very interesting musical and historical links between Georgian and North Caucasian musical traditions, but unfortunately, the scholar tried to strictly follow the linguistic map of the Caucasus, and the results of linguistic research. As a result, the work completely ignores the very rich and important polyphonic traditions of the North Caucasian Balkarians and Karachaevis (obviously because the languages of the Balkarians and Karachaevis belong to the Turkic language family).

The desire to follow in the steps of linguists was not characteristic for Georgian scholars only. When the Russian composer and music theorist Sergey Taneev (student of Tchaikovsky) recorded the traditional music of the same Balkarians and Karachaevis, carriers of the Turkic languages, he was trying to prove that their music was based on the eastern chromatic scales with microtones, despite the diatonic character of their music. We should note though, that Taneev truthfully recorded the polyphonic character of Balkarian and Karachaevis singing back in 1886 (see Taneev 1947). More paradoxically and importantly for our topic, in an attempt to bring the musical traditions of the Balkarians and Karachaevis close to the monophonic cultures of the Moslem Turkic peoples, a few later collectors of Balkarian and Karachaevis songs were publishing their traditional polyphonic songs without the bass part(!), as one-part, monophonic songs (see the review in Rakhaev, 1988). This kind of neglect of salient musical characteristics was the natural result of overestimating the importance of linguistics for ethnological and ethnogenetic studies, as musicologists tried to closely follow linguistic data and conclusions.

• What we compare and how we compare

Comparative studies use different methodologies and different elements of music to establish connections between cultures, or to establish common principles that underlay different scales, polyphonic types, musical instruments, etc, and to map big geographical regions of the world according to these principles. Possibly the earliest (and the most intuitive) method for research was the immediate comparison of general **aural** impressions. This method is still in use. For example, Victor Grauer’s 2006 very interesting article amply uses aural impressions for large-scale geographic and historic comparison. Some works base their comparisons on **scale** systems – let us remember that, as a discipline, ethnomusicology actually started after Ellis introduced the system of cents for the precise measurement of different scales. Some works are mostly based on

rhythmic formulas – this method is very characteristic, for example, for Russian and Ukrainian ethnomusicology. The comparison of **melodies** and melodic formulas is one of the most widespread methods of intercultural comparisons. Comparative works can also use combination of several elements, sometimes with the whole system of ethnographic elements from the compared cultures. Some comparative works aim to establish a relationship between cultures (sometimes geographically distant ones), and some works aim to study a specific musical phenomenon (for example, the distribution and origin of pentatonic scales, or the history of bowed instruments).

All the abovementioned elements of music that scholars had been using for comparative studies (scale systems, rhythmic formulas, melodic formulas) are present in both monophonic and polyphonic music. It is very important to remember that, besides these common features, polyphonic music has few specifically polyphonic elements that are very helpful for comparative studies. These elements are (1) **polyphonic type** (drone, heterophony, ostinato, counterpoint, parallelism, etc), (2) vertical **coordination of voices** (coordination on consonant or dissonant intervals and chords), (3) **social organization of the singing ensemble** (how many people are singing the melody and other voices, or how important is the antiphonal alternation between the soloist and group, or between the groups), (4) **social organization of musical activity** within the society (is society divided into performers and listeners? Are there professional musicians in a society? Or is the whole society involved in a performance?).

In my own comparative research of polyphonic traditions I primarily used the features associated specifically with polyphonic music: polyphonic type, principle of vertical coordination between voices, social organization of the ensemble and society, (the features are listed in decreasing importance). I found that these features are extremely stable through the time span, and as a result of this stability, they often unite huge regions and whole continents (like the whole sub-Saharan Africa), or help to establish the unity of geographically isolated traditions of polyphony in Europe. Only occasionally I used scale systems, metro-rhythmic and melodic formulas. Regarding audio impressions, I admit that audio impressions are extremely important, particularly at the initial stage of comparison, and sometimes they can be even overwhelming, but I tried to avoid making any far-reaching conclusions based on audio impressions alone.

• **Georgian and North Caucasian polyphonic traditions**

For many reasons (geographical, historical, cultural) any elements of Georgian culture or ethnography must be primarily compared with the cultures of the North Caucasian peoples. At first sight it might seem that this comparison will be a very difficult one, because North Caucasia is one of the regions of the world, where on a relatively small region side by side carriers of over 100 different languages and different religions live together. So, for example, **linguistically** speaking, Georgians are close to some North Caucasian peoples (Adighis, or Circasians, Abkhazians, Chechens, Ingushes, and Dagestanians) who are sometimes all united under a term Caucasian languages, but there are carriers of other language families as well in Caucasia: members of the Turkic family of languages (Azerbaijanis, Balkarians and Karachaevis), and the Indo-European family of languages (Armenians and Ossetians). Besides, there are large groups of relatively recent populations of Russians, Ukrainians, and a few other peoples. According

to **religion**, Caucasia can be roughly divided into Christian and Moslem parts. The Christian peoples comprise Armenians, most of the Georgians, most of the Ossetians, and some Abkhazians. The Moslem religion unites the Azerbaijanis, Dagestanians, Chechens, Ingushes, Balkarians, Karachaevis, some Ossetians, some Abkhazians, and a small group of Georgians. According to the research of **physical anthropologists**, Caucasia is populated by the representatives of at least four main European groups: (1) the so-called Caucasian physical type (the earliest type of population) consisting of the mountainous Georgians, Balkarians, Karachaevis, Ossetians, Chechens, Ingushes, and most of the Dagestanians; (2) the so-called Pontian physical type, which is genetically connected to the previous Caucasian physical type, and consists of lowland Georgians, most of the Circassians and some Dagestanians; (3) the so-called Caspian physical type, which shows parallels with the populations south and east of the Caspian Sea. This group comprises mostly Azerbaijanis, and some Dagestanians; and (4) the so-called “Armenoid” physical type, close to the Caspian type, is represented in Armenian populations (Alexeev, 1974).

According to its singing traditions, Caucasia can be divided into two parts: (1) peoples with polyphonic and (2) peoples with monophonic singing traditions. The group of peoples with polyphonic singing traditions consist of the Georgians, Abkhazians, most of the Circassians, Balkarians and Karachaevis, Ossetians, Chechens, Ingushes, and some Dagestanian groups. Monophonic cultures consist of the Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and some Dagestanians.

If we compare the traditions of polyphony of different Caucasian peoples more specifically, we will see that the parallels are quite clear: (1) drone polyphony dominates in all Caucasian vocal polyphonic traditions; (2) the vertical coordination of voices is mostly based on dissonant intervals and chords (often containing seconds and sevenths); (3) the social coordination of the singing group is also the same – melodies are sung by the soloists, and the drone is sung by a big group of singers, and (4) the social organization of musical activity is also the same, as in many Caucasian cultures traditional polyphonic singing involves all members of society. Of course, these features are not universal everywhere (for example, 1600 years of domination by the Christian religion managed to separate the singing of men and women in Georgia, although in the most isolated mountain regions men and women still sing together).

If we compare the cartography of vocal polyphony, outlined above, with the linguistic, religious and physical anthropological maps, it is not difficult to see that there are correlations with the data of physical anthropology (Jordania, 1989:250-253). As physical anthropology tells us about genetic relationships between peoples, and as physical features of the population survive even when the population loses its language or religion, the correlation of a musical map with the map of physical features strongly suggests that the features of the vocal polyphony can be much more stable and reliable for the historical studies, than the linguistic features, studied by the historical linguistics (Jordania, 1988).

• **Georgian polyphonic traditions in the European context**

It is obvious that Georgian polyphonic traditions has typological and historical connections with European regional traditions of vocal polyphony. Most of the existing

publications dealing with comparative research of Georgian polyphony discuss European links with Georgian polyphony. I am not going to discuss in detail the nature of parallels of Georgian traditional polyphony with the existing polyphonic traditions of different European peoples. To give a general survey, I can summarize that Georgian (and Caucasian) traditions of vocal polyphony shows promising parallels with most European polyphonic traditions: from the mountainous Balkan traditions, to the swampy Polesie, Mordvinian and Baltic traditions, to the mountainous regions and the islands of the Mediterranean sea. Instead of a detailed comparison of Georgian polyphony with all these polyphonic traditions, I'll try to outline the general picture of European polyphonic traditions, and will discuss the place of Georgian polyphony in this picture.

In my recent paper, delivered at the polyphonic conference in Portel, Portugal (October 4-6, 2007, see Jordania, in press), I suggested **five main types** of polyphony in European traditional music to be distinguished. These five types of polyphony have a different geographic distribution, and different historical roots. These five types of polyphony are:

1. The drone-dissonant polyphony
2. The melismatic-rubato polyphony
3. The chordal-triadic polyphony
4. The variant-heterophonic polyphony
5. The melismatic-chordal polyphony

Let us now have a look which of these types of European polyphony are present in Georgia, if there are any typological parallels with other European cultures, and what could be the nature of these parallels.

• **Svanetian**
The most Ancient Style of Singing in Europe?

Polyphony:

Svaneti, a mountainous north-western part of Georgia, is the perfect candidate for the most ancient style of European polyphony for many reasons. Locked among the impenetrable mountain ranges of the Caucasus (the highest in Europe), where the mountain ranges exceed 5,000 meters, and the roads were usually blocked for a major part of the year, Svanetians still speak an extremely archaic Svanetian language (a member of South Caucasian, or Kartvelian [Georgian] family of languages), which arguably has deep connections with the Sumerian language, the most ancient language known in human history; their traditional poetry still does not acknowledge rhythm and does not exist without a song; most of Svanetian families still have medieval family stone towers; they are still fiercely egalitarian and family-oriented; and Svanetians still sing three-part most dissonant songs with obvious pre-Christian connections, and virtually every song is still accompanied by a round-dance.

Svanetians are the representatives of the first type of European polyphony, which I call “drone-dissonant” polyphony (although the dissonant element is much stronger in Svaneti, than the drone, which is quite movable). As the name indicates, this polyphony is based on drone and dissonant harmonies (often seconds). Besides these two features, this type of polyphony is also based on small range melodies and precise rhythmic

organization. Outside of the Caucasian mountains, this polyphonic type is present among the most geographically isolated populations of the European continent (particularly, but not only, in mountainous regions). As drone and dissonant intervals are arguably the two most important elements of musical language of traditional polyphony in the whole of Georgia, we can say that this style of polyphony is more or less present in all musical dialects of Georgia, and is prominent in most of the North Caucasian polyphonic traditions.

As I have already mentioned, this style of polyphony is present in several isolated regions of the European continent: the mountainous Balkan regions (particularly among the Labs in Albania and the Shops in Bulgaria), the biggest forest and swampy region of Europe – Polesie (the border region between the Ukraine, Belarus and Russia), the Baltic region (particularly in western Latvia and north-east Lithuania), and a few other isolated “polyphonic islands” of East Europe, including Mordva.

So, drone-dissonant polyphony has a very peculiar stratification all over Europe – they are scattered through huge territories, and each of the traditions represent an isolated environment or a geographically marginal zone. This kind of geographic distribution is very typical of the archaic, relict phenomena, and that’s why the idea of the “ancient survival” of this type of polyphony has been circulating among European ethnomusicologists for almost a century (beginning with the works of Ludwik Kuba in the 1900s). As you would expect, different authors expressed different ideas about locating the origins of this style of polyphony in time and space, but the majority of scholars agreed that this was arguably the oldest surviving singing style of the old European peoples (see, for example, Rihtman, 1958, Kauffman, 1966, Lomax, 1976). Suggestion of the archaic character of drone-dissonant polyphony has been one of the most obvious and loud “dissonances” in the placidly accepted view among musicologists about the late origin of vocal polyphony.

In recent years Rudolf Brandl expressed an alternative view on the age of drone polyphony in Europe, suggesting that this type of polyphony could be a very recent phenomenon (maybe less than a century old), and possibly influenced by the instrumental forms of drone polyphony (Brandl, 2008). I appreciate the critical approach of the German scholar, but I have to state that Brandl’s model does not offer any answer to the question of why this type of polyphony appears in the most isolated geographic regions of Europe only. Have all these polyphonic traditions developed independently from each other? And why this has happened only in inaccessible mountain gorges, swampy forests, continent fringes and islands? I believe Brandl needs to find the explanation for the specific pattern of geographic distribution of this style of polyphony for his idea to be considered viable. On the other hand, the model of “survival” does explain this peculiar geographic stratification very well. Therefore, I believe the pattern of distribution of this type of polyphony suggests this polyphonic style to be a survival of a very archaic common tradition of European peoples. The question is: how archaic?

Stratification of the drone-dissonant type of polyphony in the context of the history of the European continent suggests that this type of polyphony must be connected to the common singing culture of the old pre-Indo-European populations of Europe (sometimes referred as “Old Europe”, the term coined by Marija Gimbutas for the Neolithic pre-Indo-European cultures, and widely used in later publications, including musicological works such as in Cantometric publications).

Migrations of Indo-Europeans radically changed the map of languages in Europe, although they did not fully replace the old pre-Indo-European population. According to the linguistic map of contemporary Europe, only two isolated (and of course, mountainous) regions of Europe represent the remnants of the oldest pre-Indo-European family of European languages: these are the Pyrenean Mountains and the Caucasian Mountains. Pre-Indo-European family of languages in the Pyrenean Mountains are represented by the Basque language, and in the Caucasian Mountains they are represented by three language families: South Caucasian, or the Kartvelian family, consisting of the Georgian, Svan and Megrelian languages, the Northwest Caucasian, or the Abkhazo-Adighian family, consisting of several Adighian, or Circassian and Abkhazian languages, and Northeast Caucasian, or the Nakho-Dagestanian family, consisting of the Chechen, Ingush, and several Dagestanian languages.

It is extremely important to note that *all the carriers of pre-Indo-European languages in Europe* are carriers of the traditions of polyphonic singing. Out of them, Basque traditional polyphony shows obvious signs of the late influence of European professional polyphony² (no recordings of the drone-dissonant polyphony are known from the Basque country to my knowledge), but the carriers of all three of the Caucasian family of languages have mostly retained traditional drone polyphony with dissonant intervals.

The idea of the survival of the ancient elements of the pre-Indo-European population, languages and culture in the Caucasian mountains is well known from other historical disciplines. The leading contemporary geneticist Cavalli-Sforza, for example, sums up the importance of the study of Caucasian populations for the study of the pre-Indo-European languages and the history of Europe with the words: "Caucasus is one of the few areas that lends itself, for geographic and ecological reasons, to the survival of relic languages... thorough investigation of the Caucasus populations must be a high priority" (Cavalli-Sforza et al, 1994:300).

It is not difficult to reconstruct the picture of the gradual dispersal of the old European population into geographically isolated regions (mountain ranges, swampy forests, islands, continental fringes), after the Indo-European migration waves entered Europe. The important question to answer is **what kind of musical traditions were brought by the migrating Indo-Europeans**.

According to our current knowledge, we can state that although there is a difference of kind between the Indo-European, Arabic and Turkic languages, from the point of view of their musical cultures, they belong (including some early Indo-Europeans) to the same musical macro-family, containing (1) monophonic singing traditions with (2) tetrachordal scales, (3) melismatic embellishments, (4) subtle micro-interval modulations in melody, and (5) the freely flowing rubato metre³.

After the appearance of Indo-European waves, autochthonous pre-Indo-European populations, carriers of drone-dissonant polyphony, were gradually pushed away from the most accessible and fertile lands, so the elements of the old population and culture

² This could be a result of the fact, that Basque country was one of the earliest in Europe to be industrialized.

³ The closeness of the musical traditions of the early carriers of Indo-European languages (for example, the Dorians in Ancient Greece, or the Armenians in South Caucasia) to the musical traditions of the peoples of the Middle East is well known since the works of Curt Sachs and Khristophor Kushnarev (Sachs, 1937; Kushnarev, 1958).

managed to survive only in the isolation of high mountains, continent fringes, swamps and islands.

Of course, this must have been a long and complex process of the mixture of the populations, languages and cultures, and it would be natural to expect the appearance of some mixed styles of singing in Europe. The next polyphonic style, we are going to discuss, was born as a result of the mixture of the old European drone-dissonant polyphony and the monophonic traditions of the carriers of the Indo-European languages.

• **Polyphony of Kakhetian table songs:**
Legacy of Indo-Europeans?

The second type of European polyphony which I call **melismatic-rubato polyphony** represents mostly a pedal-drone polyphony with richly embellished specific melismatic melodies (uncharacteristic for the drone-dissonant style), wide range melodic lines, and often free rubato metre.

Kakheti, the plain sunny region of eastern Georgia, covered with wineries, and famous for its magnificent table songs, is the “classical” representative of this type of polyphony. Many characteristics of Kakhetian polyphony that set it apart from the polyphony of western Georgia are similar to the main characteristic features of the Middle Eastern (and supposedly the early Indo-European) monophonic singing style (see Tsitsishvili, 1998:137, also in this volume). Could we talk about the mixture of old European and Indo-European elements in Kakheti (and neighboring Kartli, the central region of East Georgia)?

The possible reasons for the appearance of the Middle Eastern singing style in eastern Georgia can be traced with the help of historical evidence. According to the archaeological and anthropological data, as you would expect from a region where people still speak a pre-Indo-European language, there has been a tremendous continuity of the culture and physical type of population in the territory of Georgia. And only between the 3rd and the 2nd millennia B.C. there are signs of two major influxes of a new population and culture in Georgia (Japaridze, 1976, Abdushelishvili, 1964, Alexeev, 1974). Scholars agree that these influxes were most likely connected to the appearance of the carriers of the Indo-European languages in Georgia (elements of Indo-European languages are also found in the Georgian language: see Machavariani, 1964; Gamkrelidze & Ivanov, 1984, 1990).

Most importantly for our discussion of the singing style of Kartli-Kakhetian table songs, according to the data of archaeology and physical anthropology, the new Indo-European population and culture were spread only *through the lowland territory of East Georgia*, the region where the melismatic-rubato type of polyphony are present today (Jordania, 1992). According to the archaeological (and physical anthropological) evidence, the territory of western Georgia was not influenced by the migration of the new Indo-European populations.

Is there a possibility of explaining the new features of the East Georgian polyphonic style as a result of local inner development only, without any connections with the migration of the new populations? Theoretically it is possible, of course, but when the changes in musical style concern such important elements as losing the rhythmic structure, the appearance of free metre, a change in the range of melodies, a

change of scales and the appearance of rich melismatic embellishments, and when all these changes happen in a region where there is strong archaeological and physical anthropological evidence of the migration of the new population (with supposedly similar characteristic features of their musical culture), then the possibility of totally “independent cultural development” (without any external factors) seems remote. Obviously, the influx of Indo-European populations was not enough to break the cultural legacy of autochthonic Georgian tribes, that’s why vocal polyphony, the crucial element of the musical culture of Georgian tribes survived, together with another crucial element of Georgian culture – Georgian language.

Therefore, I suggest that Kakhetian long table songs represent a brilliant creative mixture of two totally different styles of music: (1) ancient European drone-dissonant polyphony, and (2) melismatic-rubato type of melody based monophony.

After discussing the historical background of the appearance of the melismatic rubato style polyphony in eastern Georgia, let us remember that a mixture of pre-Indo-European (Drone-Dissonant, or DD polyphony) and Indo-European populations and cultures was taking place not only in Georgia, but all over Europe (and in fact, beyond Europe). Examples of such a “mixed” style of polyphony are represented among the Chams from Albania, the Farsheroti Macedonians from Romania, and drone singing from Albacete, Spain. (The magnificent polyphonic traditions of the Corsicans, Sardinians, and Sicilians, ostensibly belonging to this type of polyphony, will be discussed later.)

Therefore, despite the obvious audio and typological resemblances between East Georgian, Albanian Cham, eastern Spain, Farsheroti Macedonians and a few other European polyphonic styles (see, for example, Stockmann, 1956), I suggest that there has been *no late direct ethnic or cultural contacts* between the populations and polyphonic traditions of these regions. I suggest that the presence of a very similar type of melismatic-rubato polyphony in several regions of Europe is the **result of the mixture of two styles of singing: ancient drone-dissonant polyphony and melismatic-rubato monophony.**

Unlike the polyphony of Kakhetian table songs, where the mixture of the autochthonous Caucasian and indo-European styles can be heard and historically traced, polyphony of lowland regions of western Georgia does not bear any sizeable signs of external influences (until the appearance of the urban singing style in the second half of the 19th century – see the next section). Imeretian, Megrelian, Acharian and particularly Gurian contrapuntal songs are strongly connected to the autochthonous polyphonic style with the abundance of dissonant intervals and chords. Here I should note, that together with the use of drone, Gurians developed a unique contrapuntal polyphonic style with the maximum freedom of the participating three (or four) vocal parts, and with very specific virtuoso yodeling in the highest register. Interestingly, German scholars in their comparative studies mostly used the examples of west Georgian (often Gurian) polyphony in order to compare them with the examples of early European **professional** polyphony, but they never compared Gurian polyphony to the folk polyphonic traditions of other European peoples.

- **Kutaisi:**

- The Capital of the Late European style of polyphony**

Kutaisi, the second biggest city of Georgia, is the central city of western Georgia, capital of the biggest region of western Georgia – Imereti. Despite the fact that Imereti is a home of wonderfully developed three-part traditional polyphony with dissonant chords and contrapuntal polyphony, possibly the most characteristic feature of Imeretian traditional music is the presence of a late urban style of polyphony. Urban polyphony is often excluded from the sanctuary of “Georgian traditional polyphony”, and Georgian ensembles usually (but not always) specialize either in urban or rural singing styles. At the same time both of these contrasting styles of polyphonic singing have been affecting each other in Georgia for more than a century. The urban style of polyphony in Georgia emerged after the appearance of the Russian guitar-accompanied romances from the beginning of the 19th century, and particularly flourished after the opening of the opera house in Tbilisi in 1850 (see Mshvelidze, 1970).

This late European style of polyphony (which I call the “chordal-triadic polyphony”), with prevailing parallel thirds and elements of Tonic-Subdominant-Dominant harmonic functions is very widely distributed in Europe, and in fact, throughout the world (for example, some of the best known songs of this European style come from the Polynesian islands).

There are multiple sources of information in different regions of Europe suggesting that the emergence of the new singing style was connected to the late spread of the European professional musical language. The rich choral tradition of the Alps, the tradition of “na bas” singing in the Balkan mountains and the ubiquitous singing in parallel thirds throughout Europe is the evidence of the wide spread of the late European musical language.

So, this style of polyphony, which I call “chordal-triadic polyphony” has the widest distribution throughout the European countries (and in fact, the whole world), and it is most likely to be the latest polyphonic style that spread in many countries of the Europe.

• Polyphonic style which is absent in Georgia

The brilliant expert of traditional polyphony of Russia and the peoples of the former USSR, Izaly Zemtsovsky wrote once that “forms [of part-singing], which are absent in Georgia, should not be counted as a definite type of part-singing” (Zemtsovsky, 2005:201). This quite categorical claim and challenge to ethnomusicologists is still to find its followers and critics, but variant-heterophony is a style of polyphony Georgia does not know. Variant heterophony is distinguished by the tradition of a group (unison-heterophonic) performance of the main melody of a song. Unison singing, the “breeding ground” for the emergence of heterophonic texture, is not characteristic for Georgian traditional singing, so the absence of variant heterophony is the logical result of the absence of unison singing. Variant heterophony is spread through most of the territory of East Europe, covering continuously a few million square kilometers (see Zemtsovsky, 2000). The pattern of the distribution of variant heterophony clearly points to the secondary character of heterophonic polyphony compared to the more ancient drone-dissonant style of vocal polyphony (Jordania, 2006:225-229; Also Jordania, in press).

• From Georgia to the Mediterranean Islands

It was quite a sensation when Georgians first heard (through the musical program of the central USSR TV channel) the polyphonic singing of Corsicans in the mid-1980s. For the first time Georgians were hearing a polyphonic tradition that sounded so much like Georgian. Here the power of the audio impression was at its best – the sound of strong male voices with a bit of nasality, singing long melismatically embellished melodies in three parts, and long moving drones were “shockingly Georgian”.

Very recently, after meeting in Corsica a wonderful Corsican singer Philippe Rocchi (a member of the much revered ensemble “Voce di Corsica”) I found out that Corsican traditional musicians also had a similar musical “shock” when they first heard recording of Georgian traditional polyphony in the beginning of the 1970s (personal communication from October 20th, 2008).

At the same time, if you analyze the structural elements of Corsican and Georgian polyphonic traditions, you will notice that Corsican singing style has a mixture of elements you can not find in Georgian traditional music (Jordania, 2006:186). This polyphonic style, which I call melismatic-chordal polyphony, is a specific singing style in Europe with an interesting mixture of characteristics: this is a drone polyphony (based mostly on pedal drone), with wide range and richly ornamented melodies, in free rubato metre, with triadic chordal structure and a Tonic-Subdominant-Dominant harmonic system. I consider this type of polyphony the most interesting from a historical perspective. If the “melismatic-rubato polyphony”, discussed above mostly on the example of Kakhetian table songs, shows signs of the mixture of two distinct singing styles, the melismatic-chordal polyphony shows signs of the mixture of **three distinct musical styles**: (1) ancient drone-dissonant polyphony, the legacy of the old pre-Indo-European residents of Europe, (2) melismatic-rubato monophony, brought to Europe by the early carriers of Indo-European languages and the monophonic singing style, and (3) the late European style chordal-triadic polyphony.

This polyphonic style is best represented by vocal polyphonic traditions from the Mediterranean Islands, Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily, and from continental Dalmatia as well. Some elements of this style can be also found in some other regions of Europe (for example, south Portugal).

The character of the mixture of these three elements strongly suggests that the latest element to complete the formation of melismatic-chordal style was the late European harmonic style. I suppose that before the introduction of the European harmonic element, the style of singing in these regions must have been the melismatic-rubato polyphony.

This polyphonic style is not present as a major stylistic element in Georgian traditional polyphony. Although all three elements, which constitute melismatic-chordal polyphony, are present in Georgia, they are present in different regions of Georgia: the melismatic-rubato style is present in eastern Georgia only (no melismatic and rubato singing is present in western Georgia), while the major influence of the late European chordal style is mostly present in western Georgia.

Of course, it would not be correct to propose that East Georgian traditional vocal polyphony stayed totally out of the influence of the omnipotent European professional polyphony. Even the first professional Georgian ethnomusicologist, Dimitri Araqishvili,

wrote about this influence. At the beginning of the 20th century Araqishvili remarked that European professional music was having a “negative influence” on Georgian traditional polyphony. Araqishvili was mostly referring to the appearance of excessive parallel thirds in the two top melodic parts of Georgian three-part singing, instead of the traditional more adventurous coordination between the two leading melodic parts. Despite this early influence, the functional connection of European professional music did not penetrate into Georgian traditional polyphony⁴. In Corsican and Sicilian traditional polyphony (but not in Sardinia, which shows more ancient features) the jump by the bass part a fifth down is a very important stylistic feature, and it links these polyphonic traditions with the late European musical language.

So, despite the wide distribution of European-based musical characteristics in the Georgian urban tradition, the chordal system of European professional music did not replace the native second-based chordal changes in rural music. Interestingly, when Corsican singers from the group Voce di Corsica, after hearing Georgian singers, intentionally added drones to the Corsican traditional monophonic threshing song “Tribbiera” in a “Georgian style” (when drones move a second down and up), the resulting polyphonic style came very close to the East Georgian three-part polyphonic style (Personal comm. from Philippe Rocchi on October 20th, 2008; also see Bithell, 2007:185-187). The new “Georgianized” polyphonic Tribbiera was performed on the French National TV after Voce di Corsica won the prestigious “best album of the year” award in 1995.

There are some signs that this style of polyphony might be in the process of development in Georgia, introducing a new element in the East Georgian urban singing style (like some versions of the urban song *Tsutisopeli*).

• Are there any Parallels Outside of Europe?

Understandably, most of this article was dedicated to the parallels of Georgian traditional polyphony with European vocal polyphonic traditions, but I want the readers to know that parallels of Georgian traditional polyphony lead us to some non-European polyphonic traditions as well. Sometimes these parallels are quite obvious. For example, I earlier suggested that Nuristan polyphony (from the eastern Afghanistan impenetrable mountains – again mountains, of course!) is one of the best survivors of the drone-dissonant polyphonic style of the “old Europe” (Jordania, 2006:240-247). The polyphony of the Tuaregs in the African Sahara is another tradition that needs careful study in a European context (Jordania, 2006: 252-255). Less similar forms of vocal polyphony are also present in South-East Asia, North Japan (among the Ainu), Melanesia and Polynesia. Victor Grauer (2006) suggested that the remnants of the polyphonic style all around the world could be connected to the initial style of vocal polyphony, still present among Pygmies and San (Bushmen). I also believe that polyphony has extremely archaic single origin, and I agree that some common elements of polyphony can be found among European and African polyphonic traditions, although I think today they belong to two distinct big families of world vocal polyphony – European and African. Unlike European

⁴ The European harmonic system is primarily determined by the resolution of the dominant into the tonic, or when the G major chord, or the “Dominant”, resolves into the C major chord, or the “Tonic”. This jump a fifth downwards (or the fourth upwards) is the most obvious element of the European harmonic system.

polyphony, African polyphony is more characterized by the absence of drone, more consonant-oriented vertical coordination (although singing in seconds also can be found here), and the importance of the parallel movements of different parts (obviously the influence of the tonal character of sub-Saharan African languages).

**• Conclusions and the problem
of the origins of traditional polyphony**

At the end of this article I would like to address the topic that might have been better to discuss at the very beginning of this article. How old is Georgian polyphony? When I propose that the type of polyphony that is present in Georgia today could have been present in the singing traditions of the pre-Indo-European peoples, or when I speak about parallels with the polyphonic traditions of the Baltic peoples, or the Mordvinians, or the Nuristanians, or the Ainus, how deep should be the origins of polyphony as a phenomenon?

The problem of the origins of vocal polyphony has been one of the central issues in the history of musicology. Fortunately, the old and outdated belief of musicologists and ethnomusicologists in the late origin of vocal polyphony from monophony has lost most of its supporters during the last few decades. In my 2006 book I presented numerous well-documented cases from all over the world where the tradition of vocal polyphony was lost (Jordania, 2006:200-2003). At the same time, I was unable to find even one documented case of the appearance of traditional polyphony from monophony anywhere in the world as a result of internal development (ibid, 204). Even in Soviet Union, where the state ideology was trying very hard to bring the common “Socialist musical culture” (with symphonies, operas and vocal polyphony), using large sums of finances to create choirs and to send Moscow educated composers to help monophonic peoples to reach the “inevitable polyphonic stage of the development”, there is not a single case of the appearance of a new polyphonic tradition, and as soon as Republics became more independent after Perestroika started, the first thing that happened in monophonic Central Asian republics, was that choir were disbanded.

These facts strongly suggests that vocal polyphony is not a result of the late cultural development of musical culture. In my 2006 book (and earlier publications) I suggested that the origins of polyphony are connected with the early evolutionary history of Homo sapiens, with the defense strategy of early hominids, the emergence of rhythmic movements and dance, bipedal locomotion, the use of stone tools, the origins of human language and speech, and many other factors.

Following this line of argument, it was not difficult for me to accept the possibility of the presence of vocal polyphony in the pre-Indo-European populations of the Europe. Even the idea of common roots of European and African “polyphonic families” has a firm support from my model of the origins of vocal polyphony.

Georgian traditional polyphony, on one hand, is an incredibly rich cultural artifact, one of the potent symbols of Georgian identity, acknowledged by UNESCO’s declaration of it as a part of the “intangible heritage of humanity”, and is often regarded as a unique phenomenon. On the other hand, Georgian polyphony has myriads of historical connections with the polyphonic singing traditions of Europe and the whole world. For me it is not a right scholarly goal to search for the origins of Georgian

polyphony, or Albanian polyphony, or African polyphony, as I believe that polyphony has an extremely ancient single African origin, connected to the human evolutionary history (see Jordania, 2006, 2009).

I am happy to see that the research of traditional polyphony is fast becoming one of the biggest themes of contemporary ethnomusicology. Special conferences, dedicated to traditional polyphony, are becoming a routine part of scholarly life (17 such conferences have been held in Europe within the last couple of decades). Three international scholarly bodies, specifically dedicated to the study of traditional polyphony, have also been established within the last 15 years in Europe (in France, Georgia, and Austria). The scholarly network between scholars involved in research into traditional polyphony, as well as the number of publications on traditional polyphony, is fast increasing. With the increase of speed and the availability of information, and with the new means of contact between the scholars from different countries, the return of the comparative method seems to me a welcome development in ethnomusicology. I believe that comparative study of Georgian polyphony, which started some 70 years ago with the representatives of the great German school of comparative musicology, still has a huge potential to inspire a second big wave of the new worldwide comparative research of traditional polyphony on a qualitatively new level.

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