

Introduction:

David Shugliashvili

Georgian Church Hymns, Shemokmedi School

(from the Artem Erkomaishvili Archive, Tbilisi Conservatory)

2nd Edition, Tbilisi, 2006

The defining wealth of every historically Christian nation is the artistry developed within the religious context. Georgian Christian culture, begun in the early centuries after Christ's life, has created and preserved many diverse traditions and artifacts of world importance. Though these treasures have been hidden from the world and even the Georgians for many decades, certain precious jewels, such as traditional ecclesiastical chant, are regaining a place of prominence in the hearts and minds of the public and in the life of the Church. This chant collection represents transcriptions of audio recordings made in 1966 by the famous master chanter Artem Erkomaishvili.

Georgian hymnography has a strong history of scholarship, especially regarding early neumatic forms of musical notation (the earliest example dates from the 10th century). Other scholarship has focused on chant transcriptions in western staff notation collected at the end of the 19th century. It must be mentioned that hardly anything would be known of this incredible oral tradition without the efforts of the "Commission for Chant Preservation," who began the process of notating chant in the 1860s. By that time, there were very few *sruligalobelni*¹ (master chanters) left, (changing social and political conditions halted the traditional means of chant study in the first half of the 19th century) and these few did not understand the newly introduced five-line notational

¹ The *sruligalobelni* were an elite group of chant teachers who memorized up to three or four thousand chants. Apprenticeship to learn the complicated Eight Tone system and the many varied chant melodies and harmonies for the entire service calendar took up to seven years.

system. Thankfully, several musicians and dedicated souls emerged to do God's work, and spent many years transcribing Georgian chant from the last of the *sruligalobelni*; these men included Pilimon Koridze, the priest brothers Vasil and Polievktos Karbelashvili, deacon Razhden Khundadze, and the monk Ekvtime Kereselidze.

As a result of the thousands of transcriptions collected by these men between 1880-1920, modern scholars possess an archive whose importance for Georgian church music culture is equal to the neume system from ancient Georgian manuscripts. While the neumes are a silent testimony to the greatness of Georgian chant in the remote past (and have still not been conclusively deciphered), the transcriptions from the late 19th century are testimony to the living tradition of the *sruligalobelni* which had been passed down for many generation.

Nearing the end of the 19th century, the once numerous *sruligalobelni* were becoming scarce. Russian imperialist strategies had deprived the Georgian Church of its autocephalic status (right to self-governance), and banned church services and chant in the Georgian language. This contributed to a wider phenomenon of social change evident in the opening up of western culture and music throughout the Caucasus region that caused a shift in musical interest among young Georgians. By the 1910s, only a handful of chant tradition carriers were alive, and today, there is not a single person alive to help in the revival of this broken tradition.

Under such dire circumstances, the chants performed by Artem Erkomaishvili² (1887-1967), the last representative of the *sruligalobelni*, acquire vast importance. Using two tape-recorders, composer-ethnomusicologist Kakhi Rosebashvili recorded the aging Erkomaishvili singing chant at the Tbilisi State Conservatory in 1966. The top voice, *mtkmeli* was recorded first; then using the second tape recorder, *modzakhili* (second voice) and *bani* (bass) were recorded, all three voices sung by the 79-year-old Erkomaishvili. Over a hundred hymns were recorded in this way, and are housed in the

² Artem Erkomaishvili was...

Folklore Department at the Tbilisi State Conservatory. Though of poor quality, these recordings have invaluable importance for the future study of Georgian chant.

Erkomaishvili used a small book containing hymn texts penciled with his own neumatic notation.³ In spite of the fact that the neumes contained in this manuscript differ from the neumes preserved in 10th century manuscripts, the comparative study of these sources could be the key to unraveling the mystery of the medieval neumatic notational system.

Academic centers of learning used to be located in the monasteries and churches that are plentiful throughout every valley and mountain region in Georgia. In these locations, the *sruligalobelni* taught chant to their apprentices and even during the 19th century, when most of chant schools were closed down, people continued to sing and teach within their families. Many regional chant variants (modes) carry the names of 19th century master chanters, for example: the mode of Great Geronti, Archimandrate Bidzina mode, Archimandrate Sophron mode, the mode of Archimandrate Tarasi, the Karbelashvili family mode, the Chalaganidze mode, the Kandelaki mode, the mode of ‘Simon the Cripple’, the Dumbadze family mode, and others. The chants of Artem Erkomaishvili collected in this volume represent the so-called ‘Dumbadze family mode,’ because Erkomaishvili’s teacher, master chanter Melkisedek Nakashidze, was a student of the famous chanter Anton Dumbadze.

Members of the Dumbadze family were historically connected to the clergy and many of them lived and worked in their historical village of Shemokmedi (‘Creation’). Anton Dumbadze⁴ most famous of the chanters who worked with the chant transcriber

³ Kutateladze Press (M. Sharadze, E. Kereselidze), “Zepiri Sagalobelni,” (Oral Chant) – Tiflis, 1905, Institute of Manuscripts – Q 840 Artem Erkomaishvili used the troparion and other liturgical texts printed in this book as his guide, adding his own notational system to help remember melodies.

⁴ Anton Dumbadze (1824-1907) was one of the most well-known master chanters in late 19th century Georgia, having an incredible knowledge of both the Gelati and Shemokmedi schools of chant. He lived near the Shemokmedi Monastery in the regional capital of the Gurian region, Ozurgeti, where he studied with his great uncle, the priest Giorgi Dumbadze. He was a commander of local forces in the Russo-Turkish war, and the father of eight boys, all of whom also became military commanders except for

Pilimon Koridze, is buried in the churchyard of the Shemokmedi Monastery. In Polievktos Karbelashvili's account, "Georgian Secular and Sacred Modes,"⁵ many outstanding historical chanters are named, among them several from the Shemokmedi Monastery: Iakob Dumbadze (1679-1721), priest Giorgi Dumbadze (d. 1875), and priest Mathe Gogitidze (served 1541-1560), who with his nephew Ioane Gogitidze (served 1560-1590) attempted to preserve chant through the extremely harsh period of the 16th century.⁶ Several books of neumatic chant notation originating from the Shemokmedi Monastery can be seen at the Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi,⁷ and together with the above mentioned presence of famous *sruligalobelni*, it is evident that the monastery held a prominent place in Georgian church culture.

As there are no surviving master chanters to teach in modern times, we must glean pedagogical information from written and audio sources that have survived. As mentioned, the greatest written sources come from the collections of Koridze, Khundadze, Kereselidze, and the Karbelashvili brothers, while the greatest audio recordings are from the Artem Erkomaishvili archive. While collecting these materials, these men sometimes made note of how chant was learned, as we will explore in this next section.

Some manners of Georgian chant are quite difficult. However, Ekvtime Kereselidze⁸ notes that students began gradually, working up to more difficult 'modes'

Davit, a priest and master chanter. Pilimon Koridze worked primarily with Anton Dumbadze and his son Davit to transcribe chant between 1884 and 1907. Dumbadze knew so many chants that Koridze chose to transcribe just the first-voice melody in order to record as many as possible. Later Ekvtime Kereselidze, Razhden Khundadze, Iordane Tsereteli and others worked to harmonize these melody lines.

⁵ See Polievktos Karbelashvili – "Georgian Secular and Sacred Modes" – Tiflis, 1898. p 75-79.

Polievktos Karbelashvili (1855-1936) was the eldest son of famous master chanter Grigol Karbelashvili from the village Chala in Kakheti. Together with his brother Vasil Karbelashvili, he worked to save the Eastern Georgian chant mode and wrote a book on the history of chanters and singers from the region.

⁶ The Shemokmedi Monastery is located close to the Georgian - Turkish border and was under near constant attack between the 16th and 19th centuries.

⁷ Institute of Manuscripts– Q 634, Q 651

⁸ Ekvtime Kereselidze (1865-1944), now a saint of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Between 1912 and 1936 Kereselidze organized and recopied the approximately 5500 rough-draft transcriptions inherited

and styles of chant. “The rule of Georgian chant requires that pupils must first learn to sing in *namdvili kilo* (Simple-True mode),⁹ and later, if necessary, to embellish it in *gamshvenebuli kilo* (Colorful Mode).”¹⁰ By this observation, it can be seen that students would learn the basic modes of chant, thereby ensuring the preservation of a common chant through the generations.

The term *gamshvenebuli* means to ‘ornament,’ ‘color,’ or ‘beautify,’ and refers to the process of embellishing the canonical melody and harmony of church chant. *Gamshvenebuli kilo*, or ‘ornamented mode,’ developed uniquely in each region, creating a rich texture of variation. However, it is evident that these variations originate from a prototypic *namdvili kilo* or even more basic *sada kilo* (plain mode) chant system that existed throughout Georgia. It is likely that the chant students initially learned simple chant modes, only later learning to ornament chant melodies according to their local teacher’s tradition. Pilimon Koridze¹¹ mentions this process and gives a profound insight into chant pedagogy: “New pupils initially learned *damtskebi* -first or melody voice, in *sastsavleblebis khmebi* (‘study voices’), then learned *bani* (bass) and *modzakhili* (middle voice). The *modzakhili* voice followed the melody a fifth below, and the *bani* voice followed the melody an octave below.”¹² This information seems to

from Pilimon Koridze, and the Tbilisi press operated by Maxime Sharadze. During this time his life was threatened repeatedly, but he was able to continue safeguarding himself and the chant manuscripts by moving between the Gelati, Tsvetitskhoveli, and Zedazani Monasteries. In 1936 the chants were safely delivered to friends in the Georgian State Manuscript Archive, where they were kept safe but largely unseen until 1988.

⁹ Scholars have noted three stages in the development of Georgian chant, *sada* (simple), *namdvili* (true), and *gamshvenebuli* (colorful). *Sada kilo* (Plain Mode) chant is also referred to as ‘Children’s Mode’ (*bavshvebis kilo*) and consists of the basic structure of the chant in three-part harmony without ornamentation or elaboration. *Namdvili kilo* (Simple-True mode) is a further development of *Sada kilo* in which the original melody and harmonies are elaborated. *Gamshvenebuli kilo* (Colorful Mode) is the furthest development of chant elaboration, and is characterized by strong ornamentations that vary in harmonic structure according to region (Malkhaz Erkvanidze, *Gelati Chant*, 2002, Vol II).

¹⁰ E. Kereselidze – “Shtasakhedi” – Q 674 p. 189

¹¹ 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.

¹² P. Koridze – “Topics concerning Georgian Chant” – journal “Mtskemi” . 1896. №10

indicate that the first stages of teaching chant involved a complex parallelism of voices with the bass and first voice an octave apart and the middle voice beginning on the fourth degree of the scale, a process Koridze names *sastsavleblebis khmebi*.¹³

The chant recorded by Erkomaishvili are mostly examples of *gamshvenebuli kilo* (Colorful Mode) chant, except for numbers 1, 3, and 101, which are examples of *namdvili kilo* (Simple-True Mode) chant. Three Easter chants, #14, #15, and #16 in *namdvili kilo* chant are followed by their *gamshvenebuli kilo* variants in #17, #18, and #19. By hearing both variants, scholars may study the manner in which the Shemokmedi Monastery *sruligalobelni* (master chanters), of which Erkomaishvili was the last representative, ornamented simple chant melodies.

Artem Erkomaishvili's recordings display all stages of chant development, and interestingly, one chant also preserves the described parallelism Koridze called *sastsavleblebis khmebi* (#27, the Easter kondakion, "Then Thou Didst Descend"). According to Koridze, "this kind of voice movement in parallel octave and fifths is easy to understand and remember, but is not pleasant to listen to because the voices are so dependent. Skilled chanters never sing in this manner, but only use it as a basis from which to teach beginners."¹⁴ This observation indicates that *sastsavleblebis khmebi* ('study voices') was not considered a Georgian chant mode, but was likely used exclusively as a teaching tool.

In reference to the specific chant, "Then Thou Didst Descend," master chanter Razhden Khundadz¹⁵ noted, "In my time, chanters seldom knew this chant."¹⁶ Since it

¹³ *Sastsavleblebis khmebi* can be literally translated as 'study voices,' but could perhaps be more accurately described as a technique for teaching beginner chant students the basic methods for harmonizing chant melodies. It is likely that this technique does not represent a developmental stage in Georgian chant, such as the *sada*, *namdvili*, and *gamshvenebuli kilo* chants, but was simply a teaching technique. Pilimon Koridze, the author of the *sastsavleblebis khmebi* description, was himself not a master chanter, nor very knowledgeable in chant pedagogy. However, his observations are extremely valuable as indicators of the state of Georgian chant at the end of the 19th century.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Razhden Khundadze (1858-1929), a famous master chanter of the Gelati, Martvili, and Shemokmedi chant schools, was also a priest in Kutaisi. He worked with Pilimon Koridze to transcribe chant between

is unusual that Erkomaishvili would sing only one chant in a style described as a children's learning technique (while most other chants are sung in a highly advanced manner), and equally strange that he remembered this obscure chant, it is possible that he learned this chant in childhood using *sastsavleblebis khmebi*, which could explain why he recorded it in such a basic manner.

The intervallic relationship of the three voices in *sastsavleblebis khmebi* (study voices, or beginner harmony) is reminiscent of medieval European polyphony from the 9th and 10th centuries, in which perfect fourth, fifth, and octave intervals were favored. Early forms such as organum are characterized by parallelism, and information from the early treatises by Pseudo-Hucbaldus, "Musica Enchiriadis" and "Scholica Enchiriadis" (circa 900 AD), displays a remarkable similarity to the *sastsavleblebis khmebi* found in Georgian chant. The German scholar, Sigfrid Nadel, supports this theory; "In observing typical polyphonic movement in western Georgia, it can be considered that this music is characteristic of early European polyphony, namely Hucbaldus' parallel organum."¹⁷ Nadel further postulates that "organum and multi-voiced singing must have existed in Georgia before the west... and may have been born in Georgia, spreading west into Europe."¹⁸ It is not within our capacity to prove this theory, however it is worth considering that the *sada kilo* preserved in Artem Erkomaishvili's recordings may be an example of the oldest layer of Georgian chant. The form of parallelism mentioned above therefore seems to be the most ancient form of performing Georgian chant, and became the basis for later development.

Pilimon Koridze notes the further development of *sastsavleblebis khmebi* "...After learning *sastsavleblebis khmebi* parallel movement chant, performers learned *namdvili kilo* (simple chant). The top voice was given a more interesting melodic

1884-1885 in Kutaisi, and later worked with Ekvtime Kereselidze to harmonize chants into three parts (1912-1914). He also collected and transcribed many chants himself.

¹⁶ State Center of Folklore – R. Khundadze archive, №2124 p. 242

¹⁷ Dr. Sigfrid F. Nadel - Georgische Gesänge – Berlin. 1933. p. 31

¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 35

movement, while the bass and middle voice were given greater freedom to move independent from the top voice. The increased independence between the three voices also distinguishes them from one another and improves the chant from *sastsavleblebis khmebi*.¹⁹ From this definition, we conclude that the jump from *sada kilo* to *namdvili kilo* is already a significant stage of chant development, though it is only the beginning of real ornamentation. Though the *modzakhili* (middle voice) and *bani* (bass) are given greater freedom of movement in *namdvili kilo* (correct mode), their fundamental nature as parallel voices sustains. *Namdvili kilo* chant is found in the Erkomaishvili recordings, but displays an interesting characteristic of the Shemokmedi School of chant in which the two lower voices parallel the top voice in open fifths, the second voice a fifth below the melody, and the bass voice a ninth below the melody. This phenomenon of open fifth/ninth chords is a vocal phenomenon unique to Georgia.

Further embellishment of *namdvili kilo* has always been reserved for skilled chanters. According to Koridze, “*gamshvenebuli kilo* chant (Colorful mode) is an elaboration of *namdvili kilo* chant and consists of the independent ornamentation of each voice in an orderly manner.”²⁰ The majority of chants in the Erkomaishvili archive are of this highly ornamented variety, displaying a refinement of the melody and increased complexity of the harmony parts which nevertheless conforms to rules logic and style.

Characteristic of *gamshvenebuli kilo* is the independent embellishment of each voice line to create a unified sound. Artem Erkomaishvili did not have other singers to accompany him, but recorded first the *mtkmeli* or *damtskebi* (leader), *modzakhili* (middle voice), and finally the *bani* (bass). In this way, he was able to embellish his own recordings, and leave for posterity many original masterpieces of Georgian musical thinking.

¹⁹ P. Koridze – “The Situation of Georgian Chant”

²⁰ *ibid.*

The present collection is the notated version of one hundred and thirteen chants performed by Artem Erkomaishvili in 1966.²¹ The collection comprises hymns for the services at Easter, Christmas, the birth of Theotokos, Epiphany, The Presentation of the Lord, Annunciation, Transfiguration, Palm Sunday, The Ascension, Passion Week, the Hymns of the Various Holy Days, as well as the Hymns of the Divine Liturgy. In addition there are hymns for the Ordination of Priests and Wedding Hymns. As can be expected, there are many types of chant represented including the Irmos (Theme-songs) with their Canticles, Troparion, Stichera, Kondakion, Antiphones, Introits, and others.

Artem Erkomaishvili was a bass singer, so because he was singing all three parts, they are quite low. To accommodate a wider readership, we have transposed the chants into a higher register, using the pitch registers of Pilimon Koridze's transcriptions as a guide. To accommodate the challenge of recording all three voice parts, Erkomaishvili listened to the playback of the melody before starting in with the harmony voice recordings. This may have been a common custom, as explained by 19th century poet Akaki Tsereteli, where he remarks about Koridze's transcriptions: "They are notated wonderfully, but one thing is missing, which could be easily corrected: all three voices begin together. This is incorrect. The second voice part is called *modzakhili*, -meaning "responder" because it must respond to the first voice beginning the chant. Usually the *mtkmeli* begins, the *modzakhili* follows, and the *bani* supports."²² However, in most of the manuscripts from Koridze, R. Khundadze, E. Kereselidze, or the Karbelashvili brothers, all three voices begin together. Both traditions of beginning chant must have existed simultaneously, but since the majority of chant manuscripts

²¹ Several hymns in this collection come from sources other than the 1966 Erkomaishvili Conservatory archive: - "Love has brought Thee, God" (#75) and "You are the Vine" (#118) are taken from a recording of brothers Anania, Vladimir, and Artem Erkomaishvili from the 1940s as reproduced on the Melodiya Record label by grandson Anzor Erkomaishvili in the 1980s. Four hymns are from a recording in 1949 of the master chanters Dimitri Ptarava, Varlaam Simonishvili, and Artem Erkomaishvili; one chant is from a recording of Anania Erkomaishvili (Artem's younger brother), in 1977.

²² Akaki Tsereteli – "A Few Words about the Restoration of the Georgian Chants" – Newspaper "Droeba" 1884, №40.

have a synchronous beginning, we have indicated the first notes for the bass and middle voices with small type. These filler notes may also occur in the middle of a chant where for one reason or another, Erkomaishvili was not able to sing that note.

This collection of chant seeks to serve the dual purpose of presenting a high level of artistic Georgian chant from the Shemokmedi Monastery school, and to make these chants available for church practice. Because of this second function, the editors have made slight corrections to the words recorded by Erkomaishvili in order to conform with ecclesiastical canon. In Georgian chant, there is a custom of modifying vowel sounds, especially when several pitch values occur for one syllable. For example, [i] –pronounced ‘ee’-- might be modified to [eie], or [a] might be modified to [aia], as in the word *siqvarulman* (love), which could be sung *se-i-e-qva-rul-ma-i-an*. In most cases, an [i] modifies other vowels, but when the vowel is itself [i], it is modified by a close substitute vowel sound symbolized in this text by a [j], as in *tsmidao* (holy), which becomes *tsmi-j-i-da-o*. In order to distinguish vowel-additions from the canonic text, the added letters have been italicized.

Other particular features of Georgian chant must be mentioned. Concerning the phenomenon of individual consonants being sung as separate syllables, Pilimon Koridze again gives his insight: “In these chant transcriptions, one will find many non-syllabic letters under passing tones, such as [d, n, t, l, etc.], which must be sung as if possessing vowels. Though the consonant is mute in spoken verse, it will become like a vowel while being sung if the performer quickly removes the tongue from the teeth. For example, for the [n] consonant to be sung, one must press and quickly release the tongue from the back of the front teeth, producing an unaccented and inexplicable vowel sound [nuh]. This remark should be observed by chanters as it is a common characteristic of Georgian chant.”²³ This example can be observed in the commonly

²³ Pilimon Koridze – Georgian Chant Liturgy – 1895, p.2.

sung pronoun *shen* (you), which becomes *she-nuh*, and is common among chant from all regions of Georgia.

Concerning performance practice, one 19th century observer (anonymous) noted the difference between Russian and Georgian styles: “In Georgian chanting, all three voice parts remain restrained and sparing, which is quite different from the basses in Russian chant, who open their mouths and larynxes as wide as possible to sing. Georgian basses do not open their mouths to sing loudly and deeply, and neither do the top and middle voice singers. Perhaps this is what gives Georgian chant a feeling of tender softness, which is purely of the heart.”²⁴ This description should help modern performers sing prayer with a uniquely Georgian manner and attitude. It does not mean to sing with a soft, quavering voice, as is commonly sung today, but rather means to sing with an expressive moderation according to the Christian soul – the illustrative examples of which are the recordings by Artem Erkomaishvili. In the future, the publication of all Erkomaishvili’s sound recordings will be an incredible discovery for every chant performer, scholar, and enthusiast.

The present collection is a rich example of the musical wealth of one of the most important centers of Georgian chant, the Shemokmedi Monastery chant school, which will be recognized as having a prominent place in the treasury of Georgian Christian culture.

David Shugliashvili, Tbilisi Conservatory
Translation, Ia Iashvili
English editing, John A Graham, Princeton University

²⁴ ‘An Admirer of Georgian Chant’ – “Chant of Kartli & Kakheti” - newspaper “Iveria” 1887. №64.