

SOLO AND GROUP SONGS OF CIRCASSIANS AND KARACHAYS IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Vishnevskaya Liliya

Doctor of Art History, Saratov State Conservatoire named after L. V. Sobinov

Abstract: Circassians' and Karachays' singing oeuvre is an open book in the history and artistic culture of North Caucasian peoples. The article studies the Circassians' and Karachays' singing tradition in the context of its above-musical meanings and cultural canon. A traditional song is considered as one of the links of a well-rounded system of peoples' world outlook, as a reflection of their spiritual and material culture. The characteristic and symbolic content and structure of the songs' musical text are revealed in the aspects of natural conditions in which the cultural traditions have been formed, of mental peculiarities and etiquette standards of peoples' life, of specific features of the game logic of cults, rites and rituals. The research results can be summed up in the following principal conclusions: the cultural canon presents a 'meta-plot' of the North Caucasian peoples' musical tradition; its features are reflected in Circassian and Karachay solo and group songs. The anthropological approach to the research of a song's musical text enables the author to single out the typological affinity and peculiarity in the vocal tradition of the North Caucasian peoples'.

Keywords: Circassians, Karachays, cultural canon, solo and group song

The singing oeuvre of Karachays and Circassians is an open book in the peoples' history and artistic culture since for a long time its research was dominated by the empirical principle. Times change, however: the 'dormant' self-awareness of the North Caucasian highlanders starts to awaken, multiple ethnicities actively assert themselves, yearning to experience their own history and culture: to get to know themselves. In this integrated revival process people inadvertently trigger and challenge the researchers to take a qualitatively new spiral turn towards the truth. The history of culture – the key to genetic secrets of artistic oeuvre – serves as such a new aspect of studying the musical traditions of different North Caucasian peoples.

The highlanders' singing art reflects the features of their spiritual and material culture. Spiritual intuition permeates all the layers of the national world outlook, its main coordinates being Person as a part of Nature (Space) and House as a hearth, shelter and focus of life. This worldview generates the logical range of 'Space-Person-House' accounting for all the events of real life and peoples' artistic culture. Spiritual initiation by Nature brings the highlander folk mythology close to the laws of esoteric religions: "... the initiated looks with a spiritual eye and sees three worlds rather than one. He sees the dark world of the matter and animal nature in which the inevitable Fate bears rule. He sees the light world of the Spirit, the world invisible to us, a huge hierarchy of liberated souls in which the divine law reigns, where the Providence rules. He sees humankind between the two worlds in semi-darkness, its foundation buried in the natural world, its tops touching the divine world" [8, p. 286-287]. This esoteric law of the Macrocosm reveals the foundations of the highlander Universe where Fate and Providence serve as the main topics of the uniform *Nart* (hero) saga, which defines all the aspects of life on Earth. Therefore, the concept of 'Space-Person-House' is aligned with the concept of 'Myth-Epic-Etiquette' which has created a steady foundation of peoples' worldview, their endurance having been tested by the centuries and secured in the monuments of material and spiritual culture.

The most important role in shaping the musical consciousness as an art form of reality reflection has been played by the *geo-landscape* conditions of life, the *etiquette* nature of mentality and the

symbolic essence of highlanders' traditional culture, captured in the genre hierarchy of traditional songs and their characteristic features of texture, intonation and rhythm.

The coordinates of the Universe are almost graphically defined by the mountain landscape: the vertical line, top-bottom, left-right, the little space and quick time to feel the Existence, in which "optimism was the prevailing mood, induced by a fast change of gloomy rainy days by sunny and joyful ones, which take up the majority of the year" [2, p. 45-46]. Continuous and cyclic movement is evaluated by the results of the change and renewal within the established cycle of nature and life events. This explains the affinity to the antique perception of the world as a circle-wheel. Circle semantics is opposed to mountain semantics as a vertical coordinate of the world. The mountain topography is diluted by plain, cave and water areas. Discretely outlined landscape is totally unlike the plain endless extension in the topography of the people of the steppes.

The landscape's distinctiveness is enhanced by the sound space, that ethnic sphere which has shaped the characteristic singing and timbre ideal of the people: "The acoustic space of the 'sacred' world creates the 'appropriate' sound and dwells in sound creation. Magnificent mountain forests and groves teem with the sounds of Nature. Gorges sparkling with the purity of blue rivers imbibe a whole orchestra of harmonious springs converging into one water course. Alpine meadows filled with the sweet melodies of motley grasses, mountain tops covered with perpetual snow, keep the sacred Knowledge of the world in silence. The sea, washing the mountain feet, incessantly whispers the Laws of the Road. Is it not obvious that this indescribable beauty fueled the need for responsive perception, insightful mysticism of Silence and the sound of half-whisper empower hearing all the diversity of nature and distinguishing in a unified Sound all the essence of unknowable Universe at the same time" [7, p. 144].

The characteristic feature of the mountain landscape and acoustics are reflected in the songs of Circassians and Karachays. In traditional solo and group performance there is an ensemble of male voices with the tenor performing solo and accompanying basses (baritones). Timbre division serves as the symbol of the mountain vertical line, which distinctly appears in the ensemble performance, whereas in the alternation of voice parts it shows up by association. The cyclic pattern and the circular image of the world are rendered by the continuously repeated music of the group part called *ezhu* (Circassian) or *ezhiu* (Karachay) meaning a stable, unchanging tune. Unison, eighth, fifth and fourth serve as the 'natural' intervals of the ensemble blend of the soloist and *ezhu-ezhiu*. It is wonderful how the folk singers' vocal cords apparatus is genetically tuned to perform these intervals at the exact pitch height both in the ensemble sound of the soloist and the group, and in the split *ezhu-ezhiu* part. The soloist has the leading function, he leads the singing in high range, the group part of *ezhu-ezhiu* acts as support and sounds in the low range. As a result, the most ancient and widespread in different genres is *contrast-register* singing [1] – the symbol of the vertical coordinate of the natural landscape. The type of *sliding* intoning [1] is within the contrast-register singing; it is particularly characteristic of the early genres of the singing folklore. In singing, sliding is a 'drop' of the tune to an uncertain pitch, or a fractional-pitch rhythmical downward declamation within a tune. Such singing is associated with an avalanche or a waterfall rushing down from the mountain top. Nature's 'voices', generated by the characteristic landscape physics of the highlanders' territory, are keenly appreciated by the people's musical ear and captured in their art of singing.

Another substance of general culture shaping the musical consciousness of Circassians and Karachays is linked to their traditional mentality and etiquette.

The Circassian mentality developed under a substantial impact of paganism in the conditions of maintaining traditional cultural values, such as family, fables, legends, proverbs – or more widely – in the conditions of the epic dating back to ancient times [4, p. 294]. The Circassian mentality reflects the national spirit externalized in military prowess, in the hero's virtue, in his chivalry. A Circassian is an individualist and he identifies himself with the heroes of the Nart saga: "I am like a Nart, and others are worse" [2, p. 47]. In view of this, Hegel's idea

on the spiritual and mental nature of the North Caucasus highlanders is quite revealing: “It is in the Caucasian race that spirit reaches absolute unity with itself. It is here that it enters into complete opposition to naturality, apprehends itself in its absolute independence, disengages from the dispersive vacillation between one extreme and the other, achieves self-determination, self-development, and so brings forth world history” [2, p. 43]. The Karachay mentality also uses ‘ancestral time’ and inherits the archetype of a triune creator of the world Teiri (God of Earth, God of Sun, God of Heaven). If a Circassian’s mentality aims at revealing the value-based personal characteristics of an individual, of his ‘ego’, and the world is represented by the land he dwells on, a Karachay’s mentality is addressed to the whole world through the search of a unified nature in it: “My world is everywhere, not only the perceptible bounds” [2, p. 50]. This significant difference permeates Karachay songs.

Spiritual and material culture of the North Caucasus peoples is closely linked with etiquette – a system of images, a form of communication, self-protection and self-development of traditional society. The Circassian etiquette – *adyghe khabze* – is notable for its functional universalism, it is a code of legal, behavioral, ritual, ceremonial and everyday life of the society. The Karachay etiquette – *namys* – serves as the ideal lifestyle, reflects people’s wellbeing. The Karachays say: “Who has not got *namys*, has got no happiness”.

In the North Caucasus culture the ritual forms of communication are endowed with a high degree of etiquette expression. A ritual, rite, celebration, artistic work, meeting and leave-taking, entertaining guests and a banquet feature an event that requires a strict observation of the etiquette rules and is characterized by a unique break in the routine, by communication based on identifying the communicants. This identification is effected in a special form of partners’ relationships and in a certain system of behavioral signs or symbols. The degree of the partners’ etiquette communication increases if different views of one situation arise, and in this respect the etiquette becomes a mechanism of a balanced communication between partners in the form of a dialogue which brings out differences and counterbalances concurrences: “The more features in which the communication participants ‘disagree’, the higher the degree of the situation etiquette and the obligation to conform to the rules” [3, p. 7]. Etiquette has shaped reasoning focused on maintaining traditional mental world images, has united the community-based (patriarchal and ancestral) and the individual spirit, has predetermined the need to address the canonized categories in different spheres of traditional life and culture of North Caucasus peoples.

Circassians’ and Karachays’ traditional music is a strictly structured and etiquette-driven sphere of artistic culture. Three genre layers (dance, instrumental and vocal music) are syncretically united in rites and rituals of the first stage of the etiquette culture development. Further on, this circumstance conditioned the existence of one style ‘seed’ common for different genres of traditional music. Structure and stereotype features of the style archetype are revealed on the levels of hierarchy of the participants of ensemble music-making, subordination and coordination as the main performance forms of partners’ etiquette communication. Perhaps the most etiquette sphere of the North Caucasus peoples’ artistic oeuvre is traditional solo and group songs. The etiquette ‘translated’ into the vocal language arranges composition and performance process, it is imprinted in the sound space of songs.

For instance, the tradition of composing songs based on the public council of singers and musicians – the Circassian *dzheguako khase*, the Karachay *dzhyrchy tere* – appears as quite an individual one. The characteristic trait of such communities is in their social structure (national musicians and those in the service of the prince), guild loyalty and professional multifunctional performance. It is indicative that one of the leading researches of the Circassian *dzheguako khase* Z. Naloyev observes that in its universal nature *dzheguako* can be compared to the Medieval European jugglers, troubadours and minstrels, to the Russian saltimbancos and Turkic akyns. [5, p. 57]. The council places rigorous requirements to the soloist singer who has to know the history of his people and the content of the songs, to have a good ear, voice, memory and showmanship, which allow him to play the coryphaeus role in the singing ensemble. The soloist

(Circassian *dzheguako*, Karachay *dzhyrchy*) are entrusted with the functions of keeping the singing tradition, of the creator and master of performance, since (as the Circassians say) he ‘who sings badly ... is like a man, who, instead of embracing the woman, beats her’ [5, p. 60]. As a result, Z. Naloyev remarks that “one *dzheguako* could no longer combine two or three occupations, and life necessitated the development and enrichment of art. This resulted in *dzheguako* groups being formed, lead by *dzheguako-tkhamada*, i.e. coryphaeus” [ibid].

No less remarkable was the competitive character of performing or creating a song, well-wishing, which showed a typological affinity to the Old Greek tradition of rhapsodes’ contests, to the poetic genre of aytys in the Turkic language tradition, to the contests of European Medieval troubadours and Meistersingers [6, p. 93-94]. Thus, the organizational etiquette of creating, performing and maintaining the singing tradition contributed to the formation of the features of professional musical art of oral tradition, brought together the musical culture of Circassians and Karachays with the oral canonical cultures of the East and West.

Circassian and Karachay solo and group songs reveal multiple features of the traditional etiquette culture. For instance, the gender component of the etiquette conditions that a men’s ensemble performs epic, historic, heroic, lamenting, lyrical songs; women’s solos perform lullabies, children’s, ritual and work songs. The etiquette of timbre expresses the man’s leading positions in the social hierarchy, emphasizes the greater significance of men’s unions in any sphere of people’s traditional life. Initially, the musical and poetic content of the songs sets the etiquette, because it highlights two natures: the world of personality and the world of ethnos. An incongruity between these two worlds leads to opposition as a sign of the etiquette culture of communication.

The etiquette type of relationships between the participants of a singing ensemble is revealed in the opposition links of the solo and group parts, whose hierarchy is stressed by a range of disagreeing characteristics in the tunes of the soloist and those of *ezhu-ezhiu*. Among them are: the existence of the poetic text in the solo part and its lack in the group tune, the opposition of the high male soloist’s voice and low accompanying male voices, recitation to music in the solo and melodiousness of *ezhu-ezhiu*. Besides, they use different types of singing breathing, the solo part is performed in an emotional and dynamic character, whereas the *ezhu-ezhiu* part is reserved and static. Diverging indices of the musical text of the solo and group parts are identified with the hierarchy features in the etiquette structure, which requires certain rules and regulations to be observed. Therefore, the etiquette laws have predetermined the structural type of vocal polyphony organization in the songs of different ethnic traditions and genres.

Sign and symbolic nature of Circassian and Karachay culture has found a multifaceted externalization in the architectural artifacts, tamgas (firebrands), handicrafts, verbal and singing oeuvre. A song appears tantamount to literary texts and musical chronicle of people’s history. It serves as an artistic and applied form of expressing ethnic psychology, everyday life, as a symbol of Home as the model of the Universe. The form of the solo and group songs and the texture correlation of the vocal parts, the limited amount of typical melodic formulas and image conciseness of subject-matter, recurrent melodic formulas and the reiterated *ezhu-ezhiu* tune have captured such ancient signs as circle, cycle, symmetry – signs of space world order and stereotypes of peoples’ musical thought.

As an example of what has been said above we can give a Karachay comic song “*Dzherme*”¹:

¹ «*Dzherme*» (sausage) – is a popular comic song, which, in a good-natured and cheeky manner mocks at a young man named *Shimaukh*, who stole *dzherme* from the cauldron and ate the center cut secretly, away from his friends. This example is the author’s notation of the audio recording from the reserves of Karachay-Cherkessia radio: depositary unit № 6607; the recording was made in the 60s of the 20th century. Soloist – Omar Otarov, ezhiu – B. Khalilov, M. Mamchuev, A. Khabichev, Sh. Ebzeev.

ДЖЁРМЕ

ШУТОЧНАЯ ПЕСНЯ

(КАРАЧАЕВСКАЯ)

$\text{♩} = 196$ *Джырчы (Запевала)*

1. Ой, да джёр-ме ал-лай джёр-ме был-лай джёр-ме Ме-ни джер-мен ал-лай джер-ме

Эжыу (Все)

Ой, ой! О -

кьал-лай джер-ме 2. Тыш иче-ги-си дже-ши ар бачь(а) джиб-бо-ла-ды

О - Ой, ой! О - О - Ой, ой!

А-ни ур-лагъ ан дуня-дан туббо-ла ды 3. Ме-ни джер-мен тос бол-гъан-ды керюр-ме-гиз

О - О - Ой, ой! О - О -

А - ни ур-лар - гъа ол сагъаш-ка те - ли - не - гиз 4. А - ны ашар-гъа

Ой, ой! О - О - Ой, ой! О -

Several verses of the song are intentionally provided in the example because they vividly render the imagery characteristics of the musical text: the space poles (top-bottom) and the acoustic coordinates (vertical intervals – fifths, eighths, downward relief of the solo tune), the etiquette hierarchy of the voice parts (different verbal, melodious and rhythmic texts), cyclic, symmetric and recurrent development type of the set melodic formulas in the tunes of the soloist and the *ezhiu*.

Addressing cultural traditions as a meta-plot of Karachay and Circassian singing oeuvre allows to hear and see the folk song in a new light, to state the reasons of similarity and differences of the cultural phenomenon of different peoples. The article brings out only a few aspects of the problem which requires further research, arguments, as well as concept-based theoretical summary.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *Alekseev E.* Issues of mode formation (*based on a Yakut folk song*). M.: Muzyka, 1976. 283 p.
2. *Alemedinova Z. N.* To the question of the origins of mentality formation: a cultural aspect // Ethnicity, culture, mentality (theoretical, methodological and cultural aspects of ethnic studies). Karachayevsk, 2000. P. 41-51.
3. *Baiburin A. K.* At the roots of etiquette. Ethnographic sketches. L.: Nauka, 1990. 166 p.
4. The world of Adyghe culture (issues of evolution and integrity). Maikop: GURIP "Adygeya", 2002. 516 p.
5. *Naloyev Z. M.* Social and professional stratification of dzheguako institution // Ethnography and modern times. Nalchik: Elbrus, 1987. P. 46-68.
6. *Naloyev Z. M.* Organizational structure of dzheguako // Adyghes' culture and life: ethnographic research. Issue VI: collection of articles. Maikop, 1986. P. 67-94.
7. *Kharayeva-Gvasheva F. F.* To the issue of musical instruments' mythology // Studies on Adyghes' history and culture. Issue 2. Maikop, 1999. P. 144-153.
8. *Shure E.* The great dedicated. A sketch on the esoteric nature of religions. Kaluga, Калуга, 1914. 340 p.