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Ioane Petritsi's Musical Aesthetics at the Greek-Georgian Cultural Crossroad

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Resume: *Ioane Petritsi, a Georgian neo-Platonic philosopher, is an alumnus of the Academy of Mangana in Constantinople. When neo-Platonists were persecuted, he fled to his native Georgia where he found shelter. The Pagan Proclus' Platonic philosophy, translated by Petritsi, actually represents hidden independent ideas of the Georgian philosopher, who masks himself under mere translator and comment-maker.*

Ioane Petritsi's musical and esthetical thinking has principal importance in view of the research of the history of the Georgian polyphony, due to the following arguments: musical information presented in the "Interpretation" is directly connected with the author's philosophical beliefs. The philosophical and theological problems set in the work and the corresponding musical parallels are self-evident and mutually defining. The crux of the most significant Christian thesis – the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – explains and clarifies the essence of musical dialectics of the Georgian philosopher.

With his works, Ioane Petritsi not only confirms the existence of polyphony in the 11th century Georgia, but also makes us think that Georgian music had already undergone a long-term development before the 11th century. Had it not been for a long process of development and perfection, Georgian polyphony would not have become the artistic phenomenon of the rank to serve as a reliable argument for the thesis of the Christian credo.

Thanks to the recognition of "double wisdom", neo-Platonism became the foundation of the Renaissance. Ioane Petritsi, with his original world perception, is the first representative of Georgian Renaissance. He chose to translate Pagan Proclus to recognize the concept of "wisdom of two kinds". From this standpoint the analysis of the "Interpretation" leads us to assume that neo-Platonist Petritsi attempted to reconcile "wisdoms of two kinds" – Christian and Pagan – in the sphere of music, too. Petritsi shed light upon the dialectics of national musical cognition and grasped the mystery of the charm of polyphonic songs. This mystery was declared by him to be polyphonic thinking and to be the reflection of Christian Trinity and so attested the canonization of three-part Georgian chant, 'ornamented' (mortuli) by the Holy Spirit, in the Christian liturgy.

Ioane Petritsi created his works 10 centuries ago. The value of his "Interpretation" as an argument in the study of the origin and age of Georgian polyphony corresponds and equals to the value of the study object itself, i.e. high artistic value of Georgian polyphony.

Key words: *Ioane Petritsi, Georgian philosophy of middle ages, musical aesthetic, musical parallels, musical terms, mortuleba, mzakhri, zhiri, bami.*

Ioane Petritsi holds significant place as a philosopher and thinker in the history of Georgian culture. As thinker he greatly contributed to the history of national musical culture, because the phenomenon such as Georgian polyphony has no other written source confirming its age, except for Petritsi's works.

“Brilliant connoisseur of Greek and Georgian languages” this is how the alumnus of Mangana Academy of Constantinople, Georgian follower of Neoplatonic philosophy is referred to in the 18th century Georgian sources. He escaped the pursuit of Neoplatonists in Byzantium and found shelter at Gelati Theological Academy in his homeland.

Neoplatonism as philosophical direction recognized two kinds of wisdom. It strived to reconcile two Christian theology and philosophy, thus it laid foundation to the great phenomenon such as Renaissance.

In contemporary Renaissance studies the state-cultural development in Medieval Georgia (11th – 13th cc.) is estimated as Eastern variety of Renaissance (1). Ioane Petritsi, as Georgian Neoplatonist is the first representative of Georgian Renaissance with his wide world outlook. The works that he translated from Greek and supplied with comments (“Elements of Theology” of Proclus Diadochus and ‘On Human Nature’ (2) of Nemesius of Emesa) are practically the fruit of the Georgian philosopher’s independent thinking on the given theme under the cloak of commentator. Petritsi created a whole epoch in Georgian philosophical thinking. Such estimation is naturally followed by a question: Why was Petritsi and his creative work saturated with Neoplatonist ideas unnoticed on Philosophical arena?

This can be explained by the failure of Neoplatonist philosophy in the 11th century Constantinople. Ioane Petritsi, as philosopher could work only in Georgia. His comments were written in Georgian and were never translated into Greek. This very fact, the existence of only Georgian variants of Petritsi’s works and later big several centuries-long state and cultural catastrophe caused by the Mongol invasion, followed by Russian autocracy in the 18th century; due to this Petritsi’s philosophy and brilliant results of the Georgian renaissance remained unnoticed until the 20th century.

In short the main point of Ioane Petritsi’s world outlook is as follows: the philosopher accepts the idea of “God as artist”, the Creator, who has set up the entire musicalized universe. His interest in musical art is particular. In his belief divine dialectics is best reflected in musical harmony. Only music has better “vision”(3) and “experience” of the Divine.

“Interpretations of Proclus Diadochus and Plato” (or Proclus’ “Elements of Theology”) includes a number of very interesting musical parallels confirming the Georgian philosopher’s original ken, not encountered in the original, they are Petritsi’s. The work documents and confirms the existence of Georgian musical terminology at the time. Any musical discussion is based on these terms.

Analysis of the text shows that Petritsi rejects the notion “harmony” and instead of it he uses the expressions taken from Georgian vocabulary such as “*narti*”, “*rtvai*”, “*rtvani dzalta da khmatani*”, “*mortuli*”, “*mortuleba*”, “*mrtveli*”. Any musical analogy of the text is based on the application of these notions. In Petritsi’s vocabulary the universe is “*mortuleba*” (harmony), and the creator of this is Almighty. He harmonizes universal order.

As a rule the terms “*narti*”, “*rtva*”, “*mrtveli*”, “*mortuli*”, “*mortuleba*”(4) are used when referred to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, also in regard to the occurrences which reflects harmonious content of the unity of Trinity. Most of Petritsi’s musical discussions are generalized. His viewpoint on music considers comprehensive musical information common for Greek tractates as well as the information characteristic of Georgian musical thinking. Another issue is which of these does the Georgian thinker select and give priority to when looking for the musical parallel of Trinity. To this clearly indicates the epilogue of “Interpretations”, in the musical analogy of which Petritsi presents the “*mortuleba*” (harmony) of three parts (“*mzakhr*”, “*zhir*”, “*bam*”) as the most accurate musical reflection of the unity of the three.

In Petritsi’s vocabulary Georgian notions for harmony, category of harmony have two functions: a) denoting harmony and b) denoting polyphonic music essentially different from Greek “harmony” (Pirtskhalava, 1994:86).

Ioane Petritsi is the 11th century thinker. In his contemporary philosophical vocabulary “harmony” was a polysemic category... From musical standpoint it expressed regularities of Greek

music, it implied musical dialectics realized in the horizontal, consistent interrelation of modal sounds first and then harmony based on the principle of sharing. Petritsi's "*mortuleba*" is a vertical combination of three voice-parts, the harmony of which is achieved by simultaneous sounding of all three: thus in the statements such as Heraclitus': "The distant meet each other, most wonderful harmony is created by the different and all this is achieved via struggle." And Petritsi's: "*mortuleba* (harmony) is achieved by the co sounding of non-proportionate, incorrect voice-parts". The thinkers of two different nationalities imply two different types of musical dialectics.

The problem of trinity and one whole was one of the most important problems in medieval theology. Faith in the sacred three comes from the memory ancient civilizations. It deeply imprinted analytical philosophy, particularly Pythagoras' and later was expressed in most principal Christian theses – the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Coincidence of Christian belief in three as sacred number and philosophical viewpoint, or coincidence of Christian and pagan wisdom inspires Neoplatonist Petritsi, although theological secret cannot be discussed according to Christian canons, as this is the sphere of faith, Petritsi still tries to explain this dogmatic notion, trying to approach this mystery and explain it by his characteristic "vision".

Having familiarized with "Interpretations" we are convinced that not only with regards to Trinity, but also to any other theological dogma the philosopher bases on three omnipotent sacred powers. Everywhere and in everything Petritsi seeks for and finds the manifestation of the Trinity principle. Petritsi's comments upon the thoughts of the philosophers of previous generation and of his contemporary ones. He completely shares Pythagoras' understanding of Trinity when discussing laws of arithmetic, geometry, logic and many other issues. He provides different interpretation of Trinity only in the sphere of music. His originality, as of a philosopher, concerning the theses of Trinity, is clearly manifested in music analogies.

The history of musical theory has preserved many attempts to find the unity of Trinity in music; Petritsi's musical trinity differs from them, Pythagoras' trinity is as follows: three-dimensional, cube-shaped musical tone with 3cm bottom, absolutely abstract comprehension of musical trinity (Losev, 24:107).

Analytical musical theory considered musical system with three tetrachords as perfected (Gertsman, 1986:29-30).

Three basic steps were distinguished among the steps of musical system as most important: hypate (basis), nete (top) and mese (middle, the centre binding the system).

Among the intervals most significant were three: fourth, fifth and octave. According to musical tractates (Ptolemy) harmonious interrelation of the afore-mentioned intervals was considered as most perfected and corresponding to human inner spiritual state. What does Petritsi oppose to this? To the wide spectrum of musical triplets in the theory of antique music Petritsi opposed the only very simple construction – unity of three vertical voice-parts – united sounding of *mzakhri*, *zhiri* and *bami*. On the background of musical triplets known in Greek musical theory Petritsi's musical trinity is distinguished as the musical trinity most approximated to the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and it is the musical trinity most accurately reflecting its content.

Here is short excerpt on musical analogy from the afterword of "Interpretations": "And hereby I will speak of three blended tunes (*dabamva*) by means of three voices, which are articulated by all vocal parts such as *mzakhr*, *zhir* and *bam* and by any blending of strings and voices. By means of these three the harmony of voices is achieved as from unevenness of ornamented harmonies the final evenness of choral harmony is created. And as among the same numbers you will see the supreme Holy Trinity..... The fatherhood of the Father, birth of the Son and revelation of Holy Spirit, united is nature and different in bodies, which you can also see here in the ornamented harmony of *mzakhr*, *zhir* and *bam* different in garments or accompaniments (Petritsi, 1940 edition: 220). The afore-mentioned can be estimated as a musical-aesthetic regulation of argument value, uttered by Petritsi about his contemporary consciousness. This musical analogy of the afterword is the key which can be used as cipher, code to explain Ioane Petritsi's musical aesthetic thinking, the musical analogies presented in his work.

Translation of “Elements of Theology” preceded the translation of Nemesius of Emesa’s “On Human Nature” supplied with comments. It is noteworthy that in this work it is already usual to use the notions of national origin with specific function such as *rtva, mortuleba*.

Petritsi, is the great theologian philosopher, whose love and obedience to the Lord never circumscribed his world outlook and interests as of a thinker. Petritsi is interested not only in the relation between the Creator of the world the categories in his proximity, the dialectics of one and three, but in world as creation, and a human gifted with intelligent spirit as a unifier (mediator) between mortal and eternal initials. Unlike Proclus’ “Interpretations”, where vocal music is used to show Christian dogm, in “On Human Nature” human reflection is shown in the parallels of instrumental music. Petritsi sees the analogy of the interrelation between spirit and body in the relation between artist and musical instrument: human body is instrument for spirit. Spirit has the function of artist, body – of instrument. Performer suffers on untuned instrument as much as spirit in sick body. It is noteworthy that Georgian language has preserved to this day the word denoting the instrument ready to be played on, which absolutely corresponds to Petritsi’s term *mortuli*. The latter has survived in Georgian literary and folk vocabulary.

The lexical material of “Interpretations” and “On Human Nature” and its musical parallels confirm Petritsi’s complete independence and originality as of a translator, aesthetically thinking creator. Analysis of “Elements of Theology” shows that although the theme of Proclus’ discussion mostly touches upon dialectics, neither the excerpts corresponding to Petritsi’s musical parallels, nor the term “harmony” was found in the work. The same can be said about “On Human Nature”.

The translations commented by Petritsi testify to his particular attitude to the art of music. Petritsi as thinker remains aesthete in relation to any theme. He hears music everywhere and in everything, for Petritsi a human is the “bodily harmony (*mortuleba*)”. Art of music is the most wonderful achievement of “artistic” activity – inner movement of spirit without external sounding. According to Petritsi’s logic musical thinking is also inner movement of spirit, but with external sounding, expressed by musical harmony (*mrtveloba*). Petritsi’s translations make clear that in his opinion music as thinking is a substantially higher category. This is why this branch of art is so distinguished for the Georgian thinker. Such attitude to music is confirmed by all his musical parallels, by both of his translations, particularly by “Interpretations” – a wonderful example of Georgian musical aesthetical thinking in Middle Ages.

In the end I would like to refer to significant information from the history of world medicine, which adds another point to Petritsi’s multilateral talents as of a distinguished Medieval thinker. It is presumed that Petrizzelli of Salerno – the author of the well-known medical book “Practice” is Ioane Petritsi. Both the book and its author were very popular throughout Europe (Shengelia, 1988:127). The work is considered as a significant source of medical-scientific thinking. Petritsi’s interest to “On Human Nature” may possibly confirm the aforementioned supposition.

Familiarized with Greek culture and standing at the crossroad of Georgian-Greek cultures, Petritsi understood the secret of the charm of polyphonic song. He declared this secret – seen in polyphonic thinking the reflection of Christian Trinity and confirmed canonicity(5) of Georgian three-part chant ‘ornamented’ by Holy Spirit. Today, ten centuries later we can substantiate antiquity and identity of national music through Ioane Petritsi’s philosophy.

Notes

1. The oldest surviving Georgian manuscript dates back to the 14th century is preserved at K. Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts. The paper will refer to Petritsi’s work shortened as “Interpretations”. Nemesius of Emesa – 4th century Neoplatonist . His “On Human Nature” was first translated into Latin in 1159; Petritsi’s Georgian translation preceded this in half a century. Three variants of this work are preserved in Georgia today: A (15th c.), A1 (18th c.), A2 (19th c.)

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3. "Vision" – the ability of intuitive ("contemplated") cognition, different from the logical one.

4. "*Narti*", "*rtvai*" denote spun thread, process of spinning.

5. By mentioning Holy Spirit with regard to three-part chant Petritsi especially emphasizes its canonicity. From this standpoint the merit of Petritsi's "Interpretations" as theoretical document is invaluable for the history of Georgian polyphony and canonic chanting.

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