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GEORGIAN PANPIPE (LARCHEMI/SOINARI): TRADITION AND INNOVATION¹

Nino Razmadze

Tutors: Doctor of Art,
Emer. Prof. Rusudan Tsurtsunia;
PhD David Shughliashvili;
V. Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire
Tbilisi 0108, Georgia

Annotation:

Within the process of traditional music renovation, the transformation of folk music instruments is topical in every culture. Nontraditional, tempered instruments of different sizes, made of nontraditional material and uncommon technology, as well as ensembles of these instruments, have actively been used since the beginning of the 20th century. Alongside the transformation of the instrument's appearance and changes in tuning, the repertory has also undergone substantial transformation.

As a rule, traditional and innovative forms of musical instruments co-exist in Georgian culture. In this regard, one of the exceptions is the Georgian panflute (called Larchemi in Samegrelo and Soinari in Guria), which has disappeared from everyday usage. This paper presents the traditional and innovative functional characteristics of the Georgian panflute, along with research of the transformation process, its reasons and results.

Keywords: *Georgian Panpipe, Larchemi, Soinari, Georgian folk musical instruments, Georgian traditional instrumentarium*

Introduction

Within the process of traditional music renovation, the transformation of folk music instruments is topical in every culture. Tempered instruments of different sizes, manufactured with modern technology from non-traditional materials, have actively been used since the beginning of the 20th century, whether alone in or ensembles. Alongside the transformation of the instrument's appearance and changes in tuning, the repertory has also undergone substantial transformation. For most players and listeners of Georgian instruments, these new instruments are valued as a new way to express national identity, although a small number of musician-performers and most Georgian researchers of traditional music disagree, preferring to focus on the conservation of Georgian traditional music. Thus, transformed Georgian instruments and corresponding forms of instrumental music have not yet been researched by Georgian ethnomusicologists.

As a rule, traditional and modernized forms of musical instruments co-exist in Georgian culture. In this regard, one of the exceptions is the Georgian panflute (called Larchemi in Samegrelo and Soinari in Guria), which has disappeared from everyday usage.

A number of Georgian researchers have written about the Georgian panpipe (D. Arakishvili, I. Javakhishvili, V. Steshenko-Kutpina, S. Makalatia, K. Rosebashvili, O. Chijavadze, M. Shilakadze, G. Simvulidi, N. Mshvelidze, T. Zhvania, I. Zhghenti, etc.). The most important works are those of V. Steshenko-Kuptina [1], D. Arakishvili [2] and K. Rosebashvili [3–7]. In addition, a very important ethnographic report is given by Sergi Makalatia [8]. Fieldwork expedition materials – in particular, audio and score samples – are provided by Mshvelidze (*soinari* – 1931 [9]), Steshenko-

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Kuptina (*larchemi* and *soinari* – 1936 [1]), Chijavadze (*larchemi* – 1959 [10]) and Rosebashvili (*larchemi* – 1958 [11]; *soinari* – 1959 [12]).

Thus, our knowledge about the instrument's organology, ethnology, and musical repertoire is based on notes and materials gathered in the first half of the 20th century. Later, the instrument was revived and became established in Georgian stage folklore thanks to some individual enthusiasts.

Traditional *larchemi/soinari*

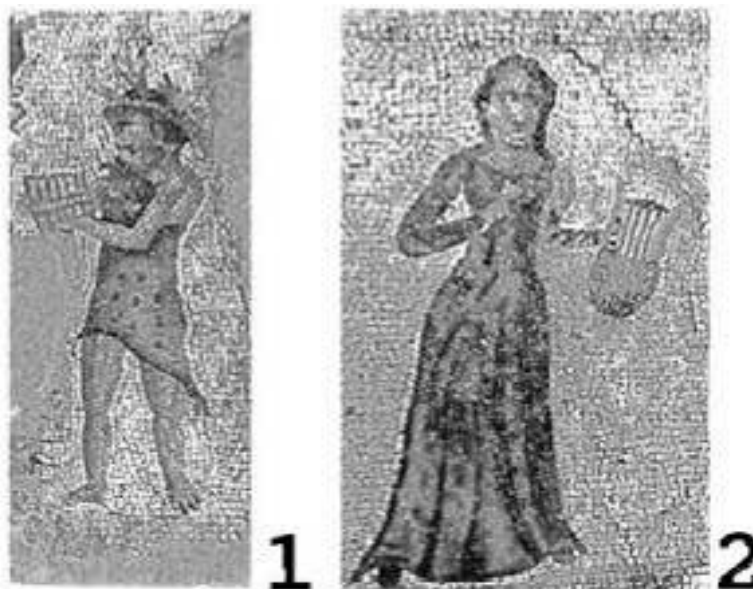
The *larchemi/soinari* is one of the oldest Georgian instruments. One source proving the ancient existence of the panpipe among Georgian-related tribes is a Hittite bas-relief (dating to the second century BC) showing an image of a man in a *chokha* (traditional Georgian costume) with wheat and panpipe (fig. 1). One of the Greek myths tells us about Mita, the king of the Georgian Mushki (Meskhi) tribe, who was himself considered to be the creator and disseminator of the panpipe. Musical spectacle competitions are also described, a similar phenomenon to “Nirzi”, preserved in Samegrelo until the 20th century [13:50, 14:104-105].

Fig. 1. Hittite bas-relief from Roum-Qalah [1:64-65].



In the scholarly literature on Samegrelo, the existence of the panpipe is emphasized, along with the *ochokochi* (Georgian: goatman) figure, similar to the Greek mythological Pan, although the connection between them is not yet proved [15:27-28]. A 2nd century figure of Pan playing the panpipe was discovered in Dzalisi near Mtskheta (fig. 2).

Fig. 2. The mosaic figure of Pan playing panpipe and a woman with a lyra. 2nd century AD [16:88].



Four of the five names for the Georgia panpipe – *larchemi* (Samegrelo), *soinari* (Guria), *ostvinoni* (Lazeti), *sastvineli* (old literature), and *sastsrapo* (Samegrelo) – originated in Georgia.

It is extremely interesting that in the 11th century work by Basili of Caesarea, “Haxaëmeros” (Six Days of Creation), translated from Greek into Georgian by Giorgi Mtatsmindeli, the term *solinari* is defined as panpipe [17:42]. There is a discussion about the vase in the original text “τῶν κúδων” (Tôn kádōn, dishware, vase, small barrel – in the plural), so the term has not been directly translated but replaced with its Georgian analog – familiar to Georgians with its local name.

According to the specimens and documentation available to us today, Georgian panpipes were usually made from six closed pipes, although there are examples with five pipes too [8:255-259] (fig. 3, 4). This six-pipe flute construction is original and has no analog among pan flutes elsewhere in the world – with the longest pipes located in the middle, next to which two pipes are located in order of length, so that the tuning is based on diminished three-note chords, from bass pipes distanced by second intervals. The general principle of the pipes’ layout is similar to the Slovenian pan flute *trstenke*. The shape of the five-pipe flute is different from that of the six-pipe flute – the pipes are located in order of length. We have no sources about its tuning or repertoire.

Fig. 3. Six-pipe Georgian panpipe [8:256].

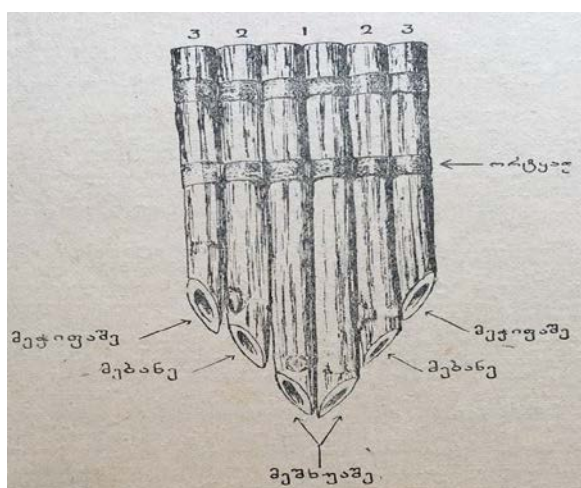
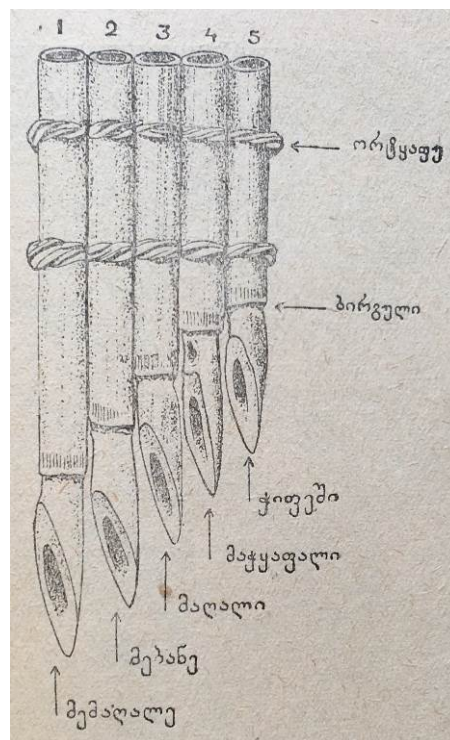


Fig. 4. Five-pipe Georgian panpipe [8:257].



We do not know whether the six-pipe flute is a developed version of the five-pipe one, or if both coexisted and played the same repertoire or not. Steshenko-Kuptina noted a very remarkable method of playing the panpipe: performers press their lips tightly against gaps between the pipes, blowing into two pipes simultaneously so that the third interval is played. The difficulty of this style lies in playing two marginal thirds without touching the middle pipes [1:208-209]. This playing technique of the six-pipe flute is not proven in notated and audio recordings. Because of differences of construction, to perform the repertoire available to us it would be necessary to use the five-pipe *larchemi* – there are many intervals of a third, so skipping the middle pipe would be necessary.

Presumably, getting this kind of sound with an easier playing technique became the prerequisite when making the instrument with an original construction. It is worth noting that the Ecuadorian *rondador*, the only one of the world's panpipes I have found on which two-voiced music is played, orders the pipes by their size.

We have more information about the *larchemi*'s social function and repertoire than for the *soinari*. At hand we have 21 notated and 24 audio examples, of these 34 are different melodies including 4 ensemble and solo (shepherds' and dance) examples².

The *larchemi* is considered a shepherd's instrument in Georgia. There is documentation about playing it in three ways, all related to cattle: first while going to pasture, second while grazing, and third while coming back home [1:211]. In addition, villagers played the *larchemi* at weddings and while marching after the overnight rituals of religious holidays [8:257]. The *larchemi* was also used to heal the sick through the ritual of "catching the soul", in which four Megrelian players participated. Unfortunately, we do not know whether the performers played the instruments simultaneously or separately.

There was a form of competition between two *larchemi* players in Samegrelo called "Nirzi", an instrumental dialogue in which two performers divided the instrument into two (3+3) and competed with each other. The winner was the one who played different tunes longer [1:209; 8:

² See the complete version of audio examples in the extended version of the article: <http://dergipark.gov.tr/download/article-file/395997>

257; 3:50-51]. When the *larchemi* was divided into two, each set of three pipes was arranged so that the longest one was located in the middle.

According to notes recorded by Steshenko-Kuptina, villagers played the *larchemi* with the *daira* (frame drum) and Svanetian *chianuri* (bowed lute). Also, in the ceremony after Holy Thursday, they played it with the *daira* and wooden trumpet [1:210]. We do not know how these two instruments sounded when performed in ensemble. Playing *larchemi* and string instruments together must have been easier than the four-*larchemi* ensemble.

The Gurian *soinari* was connected to farming and travelling, especially travelling at night.

Musical pieces for the Georgian panpipe have a cyclical form (there are no contrasting sections, but there are signs of cyclical variation); the form is always open, and the duration of the piece depends on the performer.

The tendency of forgetting the instrument

V. Steshenko-Kuptina noted, with disappointment, that the majority of society did not take this instrument seriously. The fate of the instrument was defined by its limited social function and the difficulty of making and performing it.

The tendency of forgetting the instrument becomes clear after comparing the recorded audio material and the analysis of the tunings.

Steshenko-Kuptina noted in the 1930s that the instrument had clear tuning and firm principles of production [1:224], although in the 1950s, Rosebashvili denied these principles after making ethnographic recordings. In his opinion, the tuning is dependent on the taste of the maker of the instrument and performer; this tendency is connected to the loss of knowledge about the tunings and construction of the instrument.

The same repertoire sounding differently at different times, despite being recorded by the same performer, can be explained by the damage of the instrument. Some of the repertoire sounds out of pitch, as if it is played on an instrument with no tuning.

Analysis of the frequencies, and comparison of examples recorded in different times, helped me to define the real tunings. I have defined the frequencies of each notes of the audiorecordings. For notating the tunings, I have chosen the enharmonic variants of the separate notes that corresponded to the traditional principle of the tuning.

Transformation of the instrument

The instrument does not exist in village everyday life anymore, although there are some attempts to revive it in regions and in the capital. The new life of the instrument is connected to the stage. In this new reality, according to the aesthetics of contemporary builders and performers, the look, material, tuning, musical possibilities and repertoire of the instrument have been changed; only its timbre has been maintained, to a certain extent.

One of the first attempts to revive the instrument belongs to the choreographer George Salukvadze, an artistic director of the ensemble “Iadoni” from Ozurgeti, who tried to revive the *soinari* and establish it in stage repertoire in the 1970s. The instrument is still used in two musical pieces – “sapundruko” and “aguna” (video ex. 1³). The instrument made by G. Salukvadze is very different from the traditional one (fig. 5). It is made of metal and bound with transparent plastic; its seven pipes are located in order of length. The performing manner is also different: unlike the traditional *soinari*, on this instrument two pipes are blown simultaneously, and polyphony is achieved by playing three instruments to accompany the song. Achieving polyphony with only one instrument is technically impossible because of the diameter of the pipes and their distance from each other. As for the repertoire, only instrumental transcriptions of songs are played.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cRzsiyJRcI> (09.02.2018)

Fig. 5. The instrument made by G. Salukvadze.



Larchemi is still made of arundo in Samegrelo. We must note the six-pipe instrument that belongs to folk singer Gramito Pipia, the bass pipes of which are the second and the fifth in the row. This descendant of the Pipia family, great makers and players of larchemi, learned to manufacture and play it from Grigol Kukhilava, who remembered neither the tuning nor the traditional repertoire, and only played his own compositions.

We encounter the panpipe in transformed Georgian folklore too – in the repertoire of “Gordela”, the ensemble of TSU, where the instrument is only used to achieve temporary and fragmented timbral effects (video ex. 2⁴).

Conclusion

The Georgian panpipe is one of the most ancient instruments of the Georgian instrumentarium. It stands out among the world’s pan flutes due to its original construction and polyphonic mode of performance. Despite the fact that the instrument has disappeared from everyday life, the score and audio sources available to us allowed me to research unknown features of the instrument, for instance, tuning and performance issues, that are crucially based on the analysis of the frequencies in the audiorecordings.

Transformed instruments and their repertoires, revived in contemporary practice, are diverse. Sometimes they are somehow connected to the traditional repertoire; other times, they are just used to achieve a timbral effect.

As far as I know, there are some people in Samegrelo who wish to revive the instrument. I think, possibly, the notated and audio recordings available to us, as well as reconstructed versions approaching the original sound that has been decoded by me with the maximum accuracy, could lead to the revival of the instrument in its ancient form. In that case, it could become again possible to play the traditional repertoire in the right way.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4zgTwfaCG4> (09.02.2018).

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