

ISCKMC 2020

International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»

AUTUMN SONGS OF THE OSSETIC FOLK CALENDAR: ON TYPOLOGY AND MUSICAL STYLISTICS

Dzerassa Mairamovna Dzlieva (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) V.I. Abaev North-Ossetian Institute for Humanitarian and Social Studies – the Filial of the Vladikavkaz Science Centre of Russian Academy of Sciences, Vladikavkaz, Russia, gegusa@gmail.com

Abstract

The Ossetic folk calendar has more than once become an object of research, but a musical component of the rite remained beyond the scientific interest of researchers. For the first time, the paper deals with musical and poetic features residing in the Autumn Songs performed during the celebration in honor of the start of harvest season. The sources for the study were samples from the collections Iron Adæmon Sfældystad, Monuments of Ossetic Folk Art, Ossetic Folk Songs under the editorship of E. Gippius and B. Galaev, as well as materials from the Scientific Archive of North Ossetian Institute for Humanitarian and Social Studies. The musical material Ossetian Autumn Songs is presented in the Scientific Archive of North Ossetian Institute for Humanitarian and Social Studies and in The Ossetian Folk Songs. The paper focuses on musical and poetic features of the Autumn Songs. The study involves 10 samples to analyze. It addresses musical and poetic originality, with special attention to be paid to ladoharmonic, rhythmic and melodic features of the song. General observations also relate to the dynamics of historical development associated with the extinction of a cult and the loss of contexts for the performance of a ritual song. A musical and typological analysis reveals a single musical style, referred to as Autumn Songs which is characterized by uniform ladoharmonic indicators. The paper is provided with drawings, diagrams and musical examples. Musical material is introduced into scientific circulation for the first time.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Musical folklore, Ossetic folk calendar, calendar songs, Ossetic ethnomusicology



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

1. Introduction

From time immemorial, resulting from the animation of various forces of nature, each nation has developed its own special calendar series. As known, a national calendar is structured as an interweaving of many calendars: solar, lunar, vegetative; agricultural, cattle breeding, hunting; marriage, memorial, etc. The folk calendar currently known to Ossetians is an archaic (pre-Christian) system influenced by Orthodox and Muslim cultures. The major time reference points are constant dates (summer and winter solstice, spring and autumn equinox). Following the adoption of Christianity, the names of patrons, many folk holidays, their attributes and even names began to take on the features of Orthodoxy. However, the comprehension and interpretation of the cults exhibited remained unchanged (Takazov, 2016).

According to the consultants, and as indicated by earlier studies, festivities held on significant calendar dates were syncretic events, including prayers, songs and choreographic elements (Dzlieva, 2013).

2. Problem Statement

Folk calendar rituals are one of the most impressive ritual series of traditional Ossetic culture. It concentrates ancient religious ideas and beliefs, as well as a fundamental layer of the artistic heritage of the people. For the first time a typological study is geared towards the autumn musical folklore embraced by Ossetic calendar rituals.

3. Research Questions

The object of research is musical folklore in the light of autumn agrarian calendar holidays celebrated by the Ossetians. The subject of research is musical and poetic features of autumn songs.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study seeks to comprehensively address the autumn agrarian holidays. The wider objective defines specific tasks of the thesis research:

- to identify the composition of folk genres incorporated in the autumn cycle of the Ossetic folk calendar;
- to characterize autumn ritual songs in the unity of structure, content, functions and style;
- to ascertain general patterns determining historical and cultural behavior of autumn folklore traditions within the Ossetic folk calendar.

5. Research Methods

The musical folklore of the Ossetic folk calendar is evaluated through an integrated approach that exposes an integral and systemic nature of calendar rituals, which is also facilitated by the findings in related sciences (ethnolinguistics, philological folklore, ethnography, etc.).

A theoretical basis of the study is made up of the contributions of Russian researchers in the field of ethnomusicology. The study was based on modern methodological developments of Russian science. The considerations appearing in the studies by Z. Mozheiko, O. Pashina, L. Chibirov, V. Ouarziati, etc. made it possible to address the calendar rituals across the historical and ethnographic dimension and encapsulate historical development of the Ossetic calendar folklore. This topic is also debated by some foreign researchers (Hunt & Chenciner, 2006; Mendoza, 1998; Muftakhutdinova & Khurmatullina, 2015; Smirnova, 2009; Viķis-Freibergs, 1984).

Given a systemic nature of the object, it is evaluated through ethnocultural and functional contexts. The need to identify specific musical stylistics in the musical folklore embraced by the Ossetic folk calendar called for the use of categories and concepts of musical-semantic analysis. The author also relied on a structural-typological study of musical folk forms.

6. Findings

The genre of summer-autumn agricultural songs within the Ossetic folk calendar is represented by two main cycles: one is aimed at preparing and increasing the harvest, the other marks the end of harvesting. Ritual songs performed during the harvesting rite and labor songs dated to a particular period of time designated for various agricultural campaigns.

The Ossetians began the harvesting ritual series with the holiday of *Atynæg / Tsyrgisæn* (literally “taking a point”; Digor: *Tsyrgesæn / Khælmævnalæn / Khalyvviæn / Hoska*), which was arranged for a “coordinated start of haymaking by the rural community” (Chibirov, 1976).

The harvesting rituals of the Ossetians are based on a single circle of mythological ideas embodied depending on a local tradition. For example, *Atynæg*, as a patron of abundant haymaking and harvesting, was revered in the Alagirsky, Kurtatinsky, Tagaursky, Ruksky Gorges, etc. Whereas, each settlement in the Digor Gorge had its patrons of haymaking and harvesting: Uzumag – in Vakats, Zadaleski Nana – in Zadalesk, Hanazi Huacella – in Hænaz, Gulari Gabon – in Dzinaga, Hoska (derived from *khos* – hay, *ka karst* – mown) – in Azoiga, etc. (Chibirov, 1976). According to Abaev (1972), the cult in honor of *Atynæg* was much older than the name itself that dates back to the name of Saint Athenogen, Bishop of Sevastia. “We do not know whether there were any features in the life of Bishop of Sevastia that would give reason to ascribe to him the functions residing in a plant deity. A mere coincidence of calendar dates is likely to blame for this transformation” (Abaev, 1972, p. 328).

Traditionally, prior to the start of haymaking, a community celebration was organized. Those residents involved were allowed to have vegetable and dairy foods alone. Those getting down to haymaking earlier than the celebration began were subject to a fine, and sometimes boycott – *hjody*, by the decision of the rural community. The day of the celebration fell on a Sunday one or two weeks after the holiday *kækhtsgænæn* (a celebration in honor of newborn boys, held in July), however, according to Chibirov (1976), in the past this holiday was timed to coincide with the summer solstice.

The holiday of *Chory særa kuyvd / Huarisar* (dig.) (Feast of the first ripe crop) was also celebrated in the summer-autumn period of the traditional Ossetian calendar. It was a celebration dedicated to the start of harvesting activities, during which prayers were performed in gratitude for the blessings. Some researchers believe that this holiday “was known everywhere in North and South Ossetia, except for the

lowland regions, where it was called *Bydry Tætaertupp* with a sanctuary near the village of Elkhotovo and Kakhetian Ossetians. They knew it under the name *khorakhadaentae* (literally *khor* – “grain”, “harvest”, *ahadyn* – “inexhaustible”, “productive” (Chibirov, 1976). *Chory særa kuyvd* symbolized the completion of autumn harvest campaign. According to some ethnographic sources, “in the afternoon, the feast was accompanied by the singing of ritual songs dedicated to the abundant autumn” (Ouarziati, 1995, p. 54).

The group of autumn songs is quite representative in terms of a number of records available. The samples were found in both publications and archival sources. Unfortunately, it was impossible to find any reliable information as to whether the songs were related to some specific holidays either in ethnographic literature or from consultants. However, based on some analytical generalizations of musical and poetic features, the author supposes that the autumn ritual songs, united by the name *Fæzzædý zaræg* – “Autumn Song” / *Ustur fæzzægi zar* – “Song of the Great Autumn”, were performed during celebrations marking the beginning of haymaking and when people were returning home from work in the fields. The songs, united by the name ‘*Tyllædý zaræg*’, were probably performed during the celebration of the *Chory særa kuyvd*, as well as during harvest-related activities.

A key poetic attribute of the songs of *Fæzzædý zaræg* – “Autumn Song” / *Ustur fæzzægi zar* – “Song of the Great Autumn” is the chanting of autumn rich in harvests. In describing the image of autumn, such epithets are used as: *ustur* – “great”; *bærkadgun* – “abundant”; *gazdug* – “rich”; *syzgarin* – “gold”; *huarz* – “good”. Most often, autumn appears as bringing joy and abundance – for the hardworking, and grief and misery – for the lazy. Another group of poetic motives is formed by verbal-magical texts, including descriptions of the best harvest that will later be eaten only during festive events. The lyrics also include the calls to work hard.

Mythological persons from among the deities and epic heroes mentioned in the autumn agricultural songs give an event occurring a cosmogonic character. The main body of the songs contains a reference solely to *Uastyrdji/Uaskergi* – a patron saint of men, *Uatsilla* – a patron saint of cereals and crops, and *Fælvura* – a patron saint of livestock. In this regard, a poetic motive associated with depicting the start of harvest time, a mythological basis of the harvest, the main participants of which are celestial beings, is also very significant. According to Eliade (2000), “it is not enough to know “background”, “origins”, it is necessary to restore the moment of creation. This is done through the “turning back”, up to the restoration of Time, the original, sacred, time of creation” (p. 23).

Musical and poetic features of the songs *Fæzzædý zaræg* are united by a few tunes, characterized by the structural indicators presented below.

The Autumn Songs are peculiar in that they feature exclamations. The most stable are short initial and final exclamations. They are featured in all tune patterns:

- Single: ‘*wæy!*’; ‘*woy*’; ‘*ey*’.
- Double repeated: ‘*wæ-wæy*’, ‘*woy-woy*’.

There are also others, more complex in structure and consisting of a concatenation of a short exclamation and an asemantic exclamation of the all-Caucasian diffusion *uarayda*:

- ‘*wæ-wæy, wæræyda!*’;
- ‘*woy, woy, æmæ wæræyda*’;

- ‘woy, woy, æmæ wæræydæ’;
- ‘oh wæræydæ’;
- ‘woy ræydæ woy’;
- ‘oh wæræy æmæ wæræydæ’.

A compositional structure of this group of songs is specific since extended exclamatory constructions can replace single elements of the song stanza, which can be seen in the following examples:

- the second verse line in each stanza is replaced by an exclamation (underlined)

Oh, oh, wædæ raualdzæg fæzzæg, oh, æmæ œvzæerty udkhæssæg.

Oh wæræydæ æmæ wæræydæ, oh ræydæ.

Oh, oh, khældzægæy zæg bakusut læpputæ, oh!

Oh, oh, waldzæg zæggy kūydyrdjyn u wæy, fæzzæg ta mæküyldjyn, læpputæ.

Oy wæræidæ æmæ wæræydæ, oh ræydæ.

Oh, oh, khældzægæy zæg bakusut læpputæ, oh!

- exclamatory construction replaces only part of a verse line of the second stanza

Wæ-wæy, wæ fæzzæg, dam, rallæuyd, læpputæ,

Wæy fæzzæg, ralæuuyd.

Wæ-wæy, wæræidæ, ralæuuyd fæzzæg!

Wæy bakusut, læpputæ, ey!

Wæ-wæy, dæ kütær betsyrk, dam, dyn,

Wæy dæ khur awuon, fæzzæg!

Wæræydæ, ralæuuyd fæzzæg!

Wæ-wæy, wædæ fæzzæg, dam, ralæuuyd, zægy, ey!

In the first and second of the above samples, the replacement of the second verse with a structurally isolated exclamatory construction and the third verse that follows are a stable model, which can be viewed as an extended repetend. Thus, moving from one stanza to another, exclamatory constructions of various lengths contribute to the formation of a mobile melodious composition.

The originality of a syllabic musical-rhythmic form of *Fæzzædjy zaræg* is associated with fundamentally unstable musical time of each of the two syllable-rhythmic periods. The musical time ranges from 16 to 22 time units – ♫, which to a certain extent is due to the number of syllables of the poetic text being sung.

The specific musical representation of the poetic text is associated with double repeated initial exclamations, that feature the idea of iambic rhythmization. The quantitative ratio of musical times suggests a shorter first syllable and a longer second. As can be seen from the example, splitting of the first syllable is also possible.

A tonal structure of the chants of *Fæzzædžy zaræg* is stylistically the same. They are simple tonal systems that have tonal elements with characteristic constant functions and one central support.

A composite scale of the melody spans a single octave. Melodic links are formed within a scale. Each song is coordinated with a hemistich. The modal development of the melody is within five melodic links, consistent with the verse division. The variability of the musical melody is associated with the melodic active variation and various options for choral accompaniment.

The corpus of musical materials of the song *Tyllæji zaræg* has not yet been introduced into scientific circulation. There are few samples of the song, with one handwritten notation and two transcripts of the stock phonograms stored in the NOIHSS Scientific Archive.

All poetic texts of harvest songs are down-home and represent a mere listing of the crop gathered in. A characteristic feature is one of the key markers of this group of songs – the word *bærkad* – abundance.

All known musical samples of harvest songs fall within one musical and typological group, characterized by identical indicators with respect to the structure of the musical and poetic stanza, rhythmic organization and intonation structure. All poetic texts are based on a censored verse. The verse contains one accent at the end of a line. However, it lacks positional fixation, i.e. both the second and third syllables from the ending can be stressed.

A musical and rhythmic form of the song *Tyllæji zaræg* consists of two syllable-rhythmic periods, the first of which coincides with a semantic part of the verse, the other – with a refrain word *bærkad*. Such clarity of the rhythmic and compositional structure is due to its spell-magical function.

Concerning the texture and structure of polyphony, the entire small corpus of samples comprising harvest songs has some typical signs characteristic of an Ossetic male choral song, where the soloist performs against the background of a choir sustaining a lower bass in unison. The melodies are generally identical in terms of intonation and mode. The tone of this group of songs is typical and is built on the interaction of one main support and two auxiliary ones. The composite scale is much extended and spans a single octave due to the duplication of each of the tones that are significant in terms of modality and melodic chanting. As in *Fæzzædžy zaræg*, the melodic articulation of a harvest song is consistent with the elements of the song stanza.

7. Conclusion

All in all, the autumn songs were mandatory components of the autumn calendar holidays and performed ritual and magical functions. They were nationwide performed solely by men, most often during or after a ritual feast. It is obvious that these songs were sung with a belief in verbal magic, which should evoke in life what the song is about. According to Takazov (2016), “in principle, the element of a conspiracy / incantation is not so much an impregnation in calendar and ritual songs, as an echo of the original semantics of a mythological song” (p. 143). The celestials and heroes of the Ossetic epic mentioned in the texts gave the songs a hymn sounding, partly bringing this group closer to epic and mythological songs.

As per the researchers, “the advent of calendar songs can no doubt date back to ancient times” (Shchurov, 2007). The tunes of autumn calendar songs are also quite archaic, as indicated, among other

things, by pretty narrow range of melodic turns, active use of refrain words – exclamations and re-building of the composition.

Due to the extinction of autumn calendar cults, songs generated by the most ancient ideas and beliefs of the Ossetians began to lose their inherent ritual purpose and are currently present only in the repertoire of various folk music bands.

Acknowledgments

I am thankful to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive and useful comments to the first draft of this paper.

References

- Abaev, V. I. (1972). How the Apostle Peter became Neptune. *Etymol.*, 322–333.
- Chibirov, L. A. (1976). *Folk agricultural calendar of the Ossetians*. Iriston.
- Dzlieva, D. M. (2013). Pair dances in the traditional culture of the Ossetians. *Opera Musicol.*, 3(17), 66–82.
- Eliade, M. (2000). *Aspects of the myth*. Acad. Project.
- Hunt, D., & Chenciner, R. (2006). Colour symbolism in the folk literature and textile tradition of the Caucasus. *Optics & Laser Technol.*, 38(4-6), 458–465.
- Mendoza, Z. (1998). Defining folklore: Mestizo and indigenous identities on the move. *Bull. of Latin Amer. Res.*, 17(2), 165–183.
- Muftakhutdinova, D., & Khurmatullina, R. (2015). The Historical Memory of the Tatar People in the Works of Musical Culture. *Proc. – Soc. and Behavioral Sci.*, 177, 379–382.
- Ouarziati, V. S. (1995). *Festive world of the Ossetians*. NOIHSS.
- Shchurov, V. M. (2007). *Genres of Russian musical folklore. Textbook for music universities and colleges*. Music.
- Smirnova, T. (2009). Mummery in Calendar Rites of German Settlers in Siberia. *Archaeol., Ethnol. and Anthropol. of Eurasia*, 37(3), 128–134.
- Takazov, F. M. (2016) Religious and mythological consciousness of the Ossetians. *Sci. yesterday, today, tomorrow*, 11(33), 143–148.
- Vikis-Freibergs, V. (1984). Creativity and Tradition in Oral Folklore or the Balance of Innovation and Repetition in the Oral Poets Art. *Advan. in Psychol.*, 19, 325–343.