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THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF KOMITAS'S CONCEPT CONCERNING ARMENIAN SECULAR AND SACRED MUSIC

This study was realized in collaboration with Dr. Erica Bisesi, who has executed the Humdrum software analysis. An extract from our common work with Dr. Bisesi is presented here, while a larger analysis is to be published later.

The main purpose of this article is to introduce a concept presented by Komitas. He was the first to consider two various branches of Armenian music – mainly the folk and sacred music, – as parts of an integrated cultural system. Despite certain differences inherent in inner components within particular art or tradition, they are, at the same time, the constituents of a single system, conditioned by numerous common fundamental characteristics. Komitas has formulated this approach in an allegoric form, where the kinship between the sacred and the folk branches of traditional Armenian music along with their co-relationship within a single integrated system was considered as the one between a sister and a brother.¹ In its musical aspect, the concept of kinship or cultural integrity was provided with a theoretical background, therefore it is a scientifically confirmed approach to Armenian music.

¹ **Կոմիտաս**, Յերգեցողությունք Ս. Պատարագի, *Հոգևածներ յեվ ոստմնասիրություններ*, Երևան, Պետ. հրատ., 1941, էջ 139 (**Komitas**, *The Chants of Divine Liturgy, Articles and Studies*, Yerevan, State edition, 1941, p. 139): **Komitas**, *Music of Divine Liturgy, Essays and Articles*, English translation by Vatsche Barsoumian, Drazark Press, Pasadena, 2001, p. 185.

The provisions of the mentioned concept, on the one hand, became the foundation for the formation of the Armenian national school of composition, on the other hand, it was highlighted in a broader context. Due to several fundamental principles presented by Komitas at the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX centuries, the Armenian musical thinking was incorporated into the paradigm of national Armenian self-identity.²

Today this vision of kinship between different branches of traditional Armenian music may seem obvious, whereas at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries there was a disagreement, especially in European studies over certain Eastern cultures, specifically with regard to defining the boundaries between them, revealing their affiliations, and so on. The widely accepted approach was to perceive the vast area of the Near East, along with consideration of one or two major axes as a single cultural space, formed under the dominance of this or that particular culture. In other words, the whole culture of that region was perceived as single undifferentiated oriental phenomenon with certain prevailing eastern characteristics.

Particularly, the viewpoint on Armenian music in this context clearly reveals the extreme superficiality of such approach.³

Komitas played an exceptional role in the history of Armenian music also because of his ability to use the results of his musicological and theoretical research as an essential foundation for putting forward and developing new concepts. Addressing those concepts with contemporary methods of theoretical research can provide additional arguments proving the fundamental nature of Komitas's principles.

² Մ. Նավոյան, Ազգային կոմպոզիտորական դպրոցի հայեցակարգն ըստ Կոմիտասի, *Էջմիածին*, 2017, N. 5, էջ 93–99 (M. Navoyan, The Concept of The National Composers School According to Komitas, *Etchmiadzin*, 2017, No. 5, p. 93–99):

³ Ibid.

It is noteworthy that Komitas objects to his teacher, by referring to different areas of the human sciences and employing new scientific advances. And it was no coincidence that Komitas provided justifications concerning the autonomy of national music and its distinction from Eastern cultures, along with existing commonalities, through similarity and independence of the languages within the same language family.⁴

Due to the systematic observation of music, language, dance, and other parameters, and thanks to Komitas's efforts, the music on one hand became a stable component of the national identity paradigm, on the other, those observations led to updating, clarifying and completing that paradigm, thus justifying the modern research findings.

For the topic under discussion, Komitas's research on the modal system in music is considered the most significant one.⁵ His observations on music modes of Armenian music and the individual characteristics of the modal bases, on scale orders and *tetrachord* structures, serving as construction units for the mode, provided a common ground for the main branches of that tradition. In other words, Komitas revealed a system of patterns unifying the various layers of Armenian music and making them an integrated whole, while at the same time distinct from the neighboring, perhaps similar, yet independent cultures. Armenian music became recognizable, and Armenian people started to identify themselves by their music as well.

Of course, these propositions, as purely scientific, were well known in Armenian reality before Komitas, especially since the patterns, which he derived could be explained in terms of European theoretical concepts used since ancient Greeks. For instance, Komitas described the scales as constructed by conjunct tetrachords, which has parallels with the Lesser Perfect System in ancient Greek music (σύστημα

⁴ Komitas, *Music of Divine Liturgy*, p. 186.

⁵ See also: Komitas, Armenian Church Music, in: *Essays and Articles*, p. 114–115.

τέλειον ‘έλαττον) missing a *proslambanomenos*, a lower tone, which creates an octave balance.⁶ Meanwhile Makar Yekmalian (1856–1905), discussing the musical and theoretical views of ancient Greeks in a different context, paid no attention to the fact that some of these phenomena were very typical for Armenian music as significantly important for its modal system.⁷

Despite the fact that various musicological studies in the XX century were repeatedly testing Komitas's theory, however, analyzing those patterns using modern research provides new arguments, which support the fundamental importance of provisions suggested by him.

Recently such studies were conducted by Tatevik Shakhkulyan, Erica Bisesi and Richard Parncutt, who examined the singing fragments of Armenian «Սասնա ծռեր» (*Sasna Tsrer – Sasna Cēr*) epic. The topic was analyzed based on the theory first proposed by Krumhansl and Kessler and later elaborated by many other researchers.⁸ This theory and its methodology are primarily of psychological nature and deal with the human perception of tone, pitch, tonal stability and related components. The mentioned study on singing fragments of the Armenian epic reveals that conclusions proposed by Komitas fully correspond to

⁶ **К. Худабашян**, Античная система ладовзукорядов и диатоническая система ладовзукорядов армянской монодической музыки (опыт сравнительного анализа), *Армянская музыка в аспекте сравнительного музыкознания*, Ереван, изд. «Амроц групп», 2011, с. 35–59 (**K. Khudabashyan**, Ancient System of Scales and Diatonic System of Scales in Armenian Monodic Music (comparative analysis), *Armenian Music in the Aspect of Comparative Musicology*, Yerevan, “Amrots Group” publication, 2011, p. 35–59).

⁷ **Մ. Եկմալյան**, *Մի քանի խոսք Ա. Բժշկյանի դասագրքի մասին*, կազմող՝ Ա. Թադևոսյան, խմբ.՝ Մ. Նավոյան, Երևան, «Ամրոց գրուպ» հրատ., 2006, էջ 53–57 (**M. Yekmalian**, *A few words on A. Bzhshkian's Textbook*, compiled by A. Tadevosyan, edited by M. Navoyan, Yerevan, “Amrots Group” publication, 2006, p. 53–57).

⁸ **Tatevik Shakhkulyan, Erica Bisesi, Richard Parncutt**, David of Sassoun: The Tonal Structure of Armenian Epic Songs, “*Komitas and Traditional Music Culture*”, *Yearbook of Komitas Museum–Institute*, Vol. II, Yerevan, publication of Komitas Museum–Institute, 2017, p. 182–196.

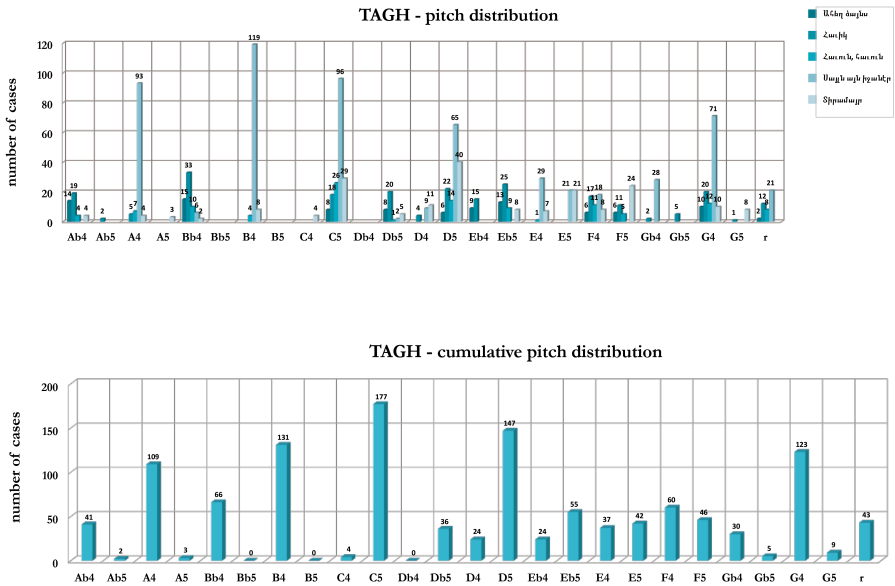
the modern research results. They demonstrate that the interval of the fourth is the theoretical basis and the axis of the tonal stability of the examined episodes, unlike the coordination by the thirds, which is most inherent in European music scale.

We decided, therefore, to compare the results of the mentioned study with a similar research on survived *taghs* (*tať*) by St. Grigor Narekatsi (X century) aiming to certify once again, or if we put it another way, to inspect the well-known concept by Komitas, the validity of which provides the foundation for the integrity of Armenian culture. Moreover, the majority of the singing episodes of *Sasna Tsrer* and the *tagh* monodies by St. Grigor Narekatsi were recorded and restored by Komitas. Those four *taghs* are: «Ահեղ ձայնս» (*Ahegh Dzayns – Aheť jayns*, here: tagh 1), «Հաւիկ» (*Havik*, here: tagh 2), «Հաւուն, հաւուն» (*Havun, Havun*, here: tagh 3), «Սայլն այն իջաներ» (*Sayln ayn ijaner – Sayln ayn ijaner*, here: tagh 4) One more *tagh* – «Տիրամայրն» (*Tiramayrn*, here: tagh 5) is attributed to Grigor Narekatsi.

In terms of the subject under discussion the following factors should be taken into account: the prevailing scales, intervals and durations, which can indicate, both individually and in combination, the root characteristics of the mode, its structural logic and the functional design of the modal construction.

For illustration purposes we refer to the observations of tone prevalence in the *taghs*. On the combined scale indicating the tone occurrence frequency in the five *taghs* mentioned above, the sequence of the pitches G4 – A4 – B4 – C5 – D5 is the most frequent. The numbers here indicate the octave sequence number, while the letter B shows the tone B (H) and not the B flat. The pitches of minor importance have been omitted. The following indicators G4, 123 – A4, 109 – B4, 131 – C5, 177 – D5, 147 show the frequency of use of pitches on the combined scale displaying those five *taghs*. Apparently, the manifestations of the two overlapping tetrachords, G4–A4–B4–C5 and A4–B4–C5–D5, are already

present on that scale. Their first and last tones have the highest frequency index: G4, 123–C5, 177 and A4, 109–D5, 147; in other words, these tones are prevailing ones in the conditional integrated pitch scale.



The results obtained when examining separate *taghs* are also consistent with the general pattern developed by Komitas. For example, in *Havik* the scale range in terms of frequency of use is the following: E flat 4, 15–F4, 17–G4, 20–A flat 4, 19–B flat 4, 33–C5, 18–D5, 22–D flat 5, 20–E flat 5, 25. As mentioned above, the less important pitches have been omitted. The standing notes of the last tetrachord are F4, 17–B flat 4, 33–E flat 5, 25. The activity of these two upper tones is not only expressed in accordance with Komitas's patterns of tetrachordal sequences, but also emphasized by underlying their function as a secondary standing notes. That means they play a significant role in the

melodic development, thereby confirming once again the correctness of Komitas's concept. In parallel, it is not difficult to build tetrachords on other consecutive tones, in which the lower and upper tones have relative functional activity in different episodes of the *tagh*.

Thus, on one hand, a cursory analysis justifies the general pattern of the Armenian traditional music revealed by Komitas, and on the other, it confirms that the secular and the sacred branches of Armenian culture are the expressions of the same musical thinking and tradition.

Abstract

At the end of the XIX and beginning of the XX centuries the Armenian musical thought became a part of the Armenian national self-identity paradigm as a result of several fundamental principles presented by Komitas. One of his musical-aesthetic and theoretical definitions suggests that the relationship between traditional Armenian secular and sacred music should be seen as a relationship between sister and brother. This seemingly simple definition was of great significance and continues to be such today.

Until the second half of the XIX century the Armenian language, along with the other branches of Armenian culture, including music, were still considered as phenomena within the other Oriental cultures, and often considered as having derived from the latter or lacking their own typical characteristics. The concept proposed by Komitas is extremely important for revealing the main features of the Armenian musical thought as well as the fundamental unity of the various areas of the Armenian music culture. The "Sister and Brother approach" primarily considers various branches of Armenian music culture as manifestations of a unified system of musical thought, therefore, excluding the assumptions about the latter having been borrowed or having a foreign origin.

For the sake of revisiting that issue we present a comparative study of two research works of equal value: the first one conducted by T. Shakhkulyan and E. Bisesi, who examined the singing fragments of the *Sasna Tsrer* epic recorded by Komitas, and the second one conducted by M. Navoyan and E. Bisesi, which addressed Komitas's recordings of the *taghs* by St. Grigor Narekatsi.

Keywords: Komitas, sacred music, secular music, *tagh*, Grigor Narekatsi, conjunct tetrachords.

Միեր Նավոյան (Հայաստան)*արվեստագիտության դոկտոր, պրոֆեսոր**ՀՀ արվեստի վաստակավոր գործիչ**ՀՀ ԳԱԱ Արվեստի ինստիտուտ**Երևանի Կոմիտասի անվան պետական կոնսերվատորիա***ՀԱՅ ԱՇԽԱՐՀԻԿ ԵՎ ՀՈԳԵՎՈՐ ԵՐԱԺՇՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ
ՎԵՐԱԲԵՐՅԱԼ ԿՈՄԻՏԱՍՅԱՆ ՄԵԿ ԴՐՈՒՅԹԻ
ՏԵՍԱԿԱՆ ՀԻՄՔԵՐԸ****Ամփոփում**

Կոմիտասի մի շարք սկզբունքային մոտեցումների շնորհիվ XIX դարի վերջին և XX դարի սկզբին հայ ավանդական երաժշտական մտածողությունը ներառվեց հայկական ինքնության հարացույցի մեջ: Նրա առաջադրած երաժշտա-գեղագիտական, տեսական դրույթներից մեկն այն ձևակերպումն էր, որով հայ ավանդական երաժշտության աշխարհիկ և հոգևոր ճյուղերը դիտարկվեցին քրոջ և եղբոր ազգակցության օրինակով: Այս պարզ թվացող դրույթը թե՛ այն ժամանակ, թե՛ այսօր խիստ կարևոր նշանակություն ունի: Մինչև XIX դարի երկրորդ կես հայոց լեզուն և մշակույթի այլ ճյուղերը, այդ թվում և երաժշտությունը, դեռևս դիտվում էին արևելյան այլ մշակույթների շրջագծում, հաճախ որպես ածանցյալ կամ տիպական հատկանիշներից զուրկ դրսևորումներ: Հայ երաժշտական մտածողության հիմնական առանձնահատկությունների, հայ երաժշտական մշակույթի տարբեր ճյուղերի հիմնարար ընդհանրությունների բացահայտման տեսանկյունից խիստ կարևոր էր կոմիտասյան այս մոտեցումը: Քրոջ և եղբոր ազգակցության դրույթը նախ հայ երաժշտական մշակույթի տարբեր ճյուղերը դիտարկում է որպես երաժշտական մտածողության մեկ միասնական համակարգի արտահայտություն, ապա՝ բացառում դրանցից որևէ մեկի ներմուծվի կամ օտար բնույթը:

Կոմիտասի դերակատարությունը հայ երաժշտության պատմության մեջ բացառիկ եղավ նաև այն առումով, որ նա իր առաջ քաշած գաղափարները հիմնավորեց և կառուցեց երաժշտագիտական-տեսական հետազոտությունների արդյունքների վրա: Այդ օրինաչափությունների դիտարկումը տեսական հետազոտության արդի մեթոդների կիրառումով ևս կարող է հավելյալ կռվաններ ապահովել կոմիտասյան դրույթների հիմնարար բնույթը փաստելիս: Հարցը նորովի քննելիս՝ որպես համեմատելիներ ընտրել ենք «Սասնա ծռեր» էպոսի երգվող հատվածների կոմիտասյան ծայնագրությունների վերաբերյալ առկա ուսումնասիրության (հետազոտությունը՝ Տ. Շախկույանի և Է. Բիզեզիի) ու Ս. Գրիգոր Նարեկացու տաղերի կոմիտասյան գրառումների համարժեք ուսումնասիրության (հետազոտությունը՝ Մ. Նավոյանի և Է. Բիզեզիի) արդյունքները:

Հիմնաբառեր՝ Կոմիտաս, հոգևոր երաժշտություն, աշխարհիկ երաժշտություն, տաղ, Գրիգոր Նարեկացի, կցվող տետրաֆոններ: