

Ioane Minchkhi – Georgian Hymnographer of the 10th Century

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Abstract: In this paper, important aspects of the legacy of the most prominent 10th century Georgian hymnographer - Ioane Minchkhi are discussed.

Certain issues of Ioane Minchkhi's creative activity were partially studied by Georgian scholars. As part of this comprehensive research into Minchkhi's creative works, the unexplored part of his creations – 77 hymns revealed by us are of special interests. The study of this unknown heritage redefined Ioane Minchkhi's place in the history of Georgian literature. At the same time, the standards and importance of Georgian original hymnography were presented in a new way.

Minchkhi's hymns are perfect examples of Georgian hymnography. Along with great traditionalism Minchkhi's creative works are characterised by great originality. It is the combination of these two factors that makes Minchkhi's works impressive and secures their special place in the history of Georgian hymnography.

As seen, Minchkhi was an editor and compiler of the first Georgian Lenten Triodion – one of the most important liturgical – hymnographical collections. It laid the foundation to the following editions of this collection. Minchkhi introduced new verse metres and new melodies into Georgian hymnography.

Minchkhi's great contribution to the history of Georgian church and literature is most fully expressed by George the Athonite – the greatest authority of the Georgian church, an outstanding scholar of Georgian and Byzantine writing.

Keywords: *Ioane Minchkhi, Georgian Lenten Triodions.*

The 10th century is a “golden age” of Georgian hymnography. During that period several generations of hymnographers lived and worked in the churches and monasteries of Tao-Klarjeti and Mount Sinai: Ioane Minchkhi, Mikael Modrekili, Ioane Mtbevari, Ioane Zosime, Stepane Sananoisdze-Chqondideli, Ioane Konkozisdze, Ezra, Kurdanai, Philipe and others. Most of them are known under the name of “Mekheli”. They were the composers of both hymn text and melody at the same time. The greatest authority of the Georgian church, George the Athonite, evaluates their activity in the following way: “I love the *Mekheli* more than anyone else. I consider them to be my spiritual guides” (Ath. 45,40v).

Their universal activity made a distinct contribution to the fact that Georgian spiritual poetry reached its acme in the 10th century - 200 years earlier than secular poetry.”

Among the Georgian hymnographers of the X century, Ioane Minchkhi deserves special attention. His name has become known in academic circles thanks to Ivane Javakhishvili, who discovered the hymns of this unknown Georgian hymnist in Georgian manuscripts – Sin.5, Sin.75 and Sin.2 during his academic trip to Mount Sinai in 1902. This was a hymnographical Canon devoted to St.George and 26 small-sized hymns. These hymns were published in “Description of the Georgian Manuscripts of Mount Sinai” in 1947 [5].

Ioane Minchkhi’s four hymns are included in Mikael Modrekili’s “Iadgari” (Tropologion) (978-988). These hymns were published in 1913 by P. Ingorokva [2, p.11-38]. Separate aspects of Ioane Minchkhi’s creative activity were considered by Georgian scholars (K. Kekelidze, P. Ingorokva, L. Kvirikashvili, L. Jghamaia).

Ioane Minchkhi lived and worked at Mt. Sinai. This explains the fact that a considerable part of his hymns are preserved in Sinaitic manuscripts. Ioane Minchkhi was a contemporary of the king of Western Georgia (Kingdom of Abkhazeti) – Giorgi [3, p.171]. In P. Ingorokva’s view Minchkhi was born in West Georgia, namely Chqondidi, Martvili environs [1, p. 132].

Research discussed here into Minchkhi’s creative works of special attention is to the unknown part of his creations – the 77

hymns considered by us [6, pp. 81-109]. The majority of these hymns appeared to be included in the Georgian manuscript – Georg.5 kept at the National Library of Paris which houses George the Athonite's edition of the Lenten Triodion – one of the most important liturgical-hymnographical collections [7, pp. 81-109].

The discovery of unknown hymnographical heritage has particular importance both for the research into Ioane Minchkhi's creative activity and Georgian poetry. The study of these hymns redefined Ioane Minchkhi's place in the history of Georgian literature. At the same time, the standards and importance of Georgian original hymnography have been presented in a new way.

In Georg. 5 (George the Athonite's edition of the Georgian Lenten Triodion) the unknown hymns by Minchkhi are indicated with the monogram "M" denoting Minchkhi's authorship. With the same monogram are also indicated Minchkhi's 23 hymns already known from other Georgian manuscripts (Sin.5 and Sin.75). This monogram indicating Minchkhi's authorship in Georg.5 is inscribed in an usual way on the edges along the beginnings of Minchkhi's hymns [6, pp. 77, 82]. The unknown hymns revealed in Georg.5 appeared to be part of a number of other manuscripts. The revealing of these manuscripts containing Minchkhi's hymns made it possible to establish the vague and undecipherable parts of Minchkhi's hymn texts.

The majority of the newly discovered Minchkhi's heritage represents small-sized hymns; for instance, Georg. 5 contains 58 his unknown stanzas. In addition to this, there are 30 small-sized hymns already known from Sinaitic manuscripts which also entered the Georg. 5 manuscript. Thus, 88 small-sized hymns are inscribed under Minchkhi's name. The exploration of the whole of Minchkhi's creative activity testifies to the fact that small-sized hymns were the closest poetic form for him.

As is known, small-sized hymns are essential hymnographical material which has to be sung during the morning and evening services (Vigil and Matins) and along with "morning liturgy poetic troparions" is an integral part of ordinary days of the Lent and Pentekostarionweeks [4, p. 820]. Thus the 88 small-sized hymns by

Minchkhi included in Georg. 5 represent one of the most important components of the Holy Lent liturgy. George the Athonite's Lenten Triodion, together with Minchkhi's stichera, also contains small-sized hymns by Greek authors. From the viewpoint of the number of stichera none of the Greek authors are presented so widely as Ioane Minchkhi.

Usually two or more small-sized hymns are presented in Georg. 5 side by side on Lent weekdays or on most important holidays.

In respect of studying Ioane Minchkhi's creative activity and Georgian-Greek Triodions the following fact is of special attention. In the Georgian manuscript Sin.5 (rewritten in 1052) an interesting note about the structure of the first Georgian Lenten Triodion, which laid the foundation of the Sin.5 manuscript, is preserved. According to this document, the first Georgian Lenten Triodion, which was separated from Tropologion as an independent Collection, contained hymns by four authors – Elia of Jerusalem, Theodore Studites, Stephanus Sabbaites and Ioane Minchkhi.

On the basis of the comparative study of Sinaitic and Athos Collections of Georgian manuscripts the reconstruction of one of the oldest types of Georgian Lenten Triodion becomes possible.

As it turns out, 7 hymnographical Canons for the Sundays of the Holy Lent created by the Patriarch of Jerusalem - Elias III entered the first Georgian Lenten Triodion. For today their full restoration is possible only with the help of Georgian translations.

In the oldest Georgian "Lenten Triodion" two full cycles of Three-Odes (beginning from the first Monday and including the sixth Saturday) belonged to two authors - Theodore Studites and Stephanus Sabbaites. Theodore Studites was well-known, although only by the name, in Greek and Slavonic Triodions. Georgian manuscripts make it possible to restore the full-length creations of this remarkable author [8, pp. 22-23].

The whole part of Stichera of the first Georgian Lenten Triodion (88 small-sized hymns) belonged to Georgian author – Ioane Minchkhi.

These hymns by Minchkhi, as a rule, exactly fitted into the places which were allotted to them in Triodion.

Each day of the Great Lent has its own liturgical service. The obligatory elements of this service are reflected in poetic material of each Lenten day: the system of reading of the Old and New Testaments. These two elements of Lenten liturgy in the course of time were subjected to certain changes and evolution. From both the calendar and reading viewpoints Georgian Lenten Triodions reflect different stages of the Greek tradition.

The material of each day of the Holy Lent frequently mirrors special commemorations of the appropriate Sundays. For instance, in the hymns for IV Sunday the theme the Holy Cross appears; the hymns for VI Sunday frequently commemorate the resurrection of Lazarus whose commemoration is celebrated on the Saturday of the same week.

Besides this, the hymns for the Lenten Triodion reflect the themes characteristic of the Lent period, traditional commemorations and images; changes taking place in dogmatic thinking at that time, resolutions of the Church Councils, etc. The authors who wrote for the Lenten Triodion take into consideration these requirements. To this complicated "regulation" is added obligatory rhythmic and melodic correspondence with the chosen heirmos which is usually reflected in the hymn by its content too.

The medieval non-Greek author was facing another big challenge – the necessity of taking into account the Greek liturgical poetry along with national hymnography. A Georgian author who wrote for the Lenten Triodion should have mastered the repertoire of Greek Triodions. Consideration of all the above mentioned required a deep, thorough preparation, even certain universality in the field of liturgics. Ioane Minchkhi seems to be well-prepared for the creation of the complete Stichera for the first Georgian Triodion.

The reconstruction of the first Georgian Triodion, separated from Tropologion as an independent collection is of a particular interest for the research of Byzantine hymnography; specifically, from the viewpoint of studying one of the earliest stages of Greek Triodion.

Small-sized hymns by Minchkhi for the first Georgian Triodion were also established in the later tradition – Sin.5 and Sin.75 manuscripts and George the Athonite's redaction of Lenten Triodion.

Minchkhi's hymns are perfect examples of Georgian hymnography. Along with great traditionalism, Minchkhi's creative works are characterised by a great originality. It is just the combination of these two factors that explains Minchkhi's special place in the history of Georgian hymnography.

The peculiarity of Minchkhi's creativity is manifested in the original reconsideration of the existing motifs and artistic images, on the one hand, and on the other – in the creation of a completely new symbolic-allegorical system, attitude and literary language. The study of artistic peculiarities of Minchkhi's creativity is a matter of future research. This time we limit ourselves just by several remarks which, to our mind, are essential for the research into artistic peculiarities of Minchkhi's hymns.

IX and X centuries, the time of rising of Georgian hymnography, are one of the most intense periods regarding the translation of Greek literature into Georgian. Being acquainted with Greek culture, as is known, at that time meant being acquainted with the World civilization. The Georgian monastic settlement on Athos made a great contribution to this. Almost the whole Byzantian literature was translated into the Georgian language by Euthymius and George the Athonites again. This path was followed by Efrem Mtsire, Arsen Iqaltoeli, Ioane Petritsi, and others. The translation of Byzantine literature was of paramount importance for Georgian literature but this time we are interested in a different issue.

A wide spread of Greek language and translations from Greek shows itself in the language of original Georgian writing and first of all, hymnography. Greek syntax, clichés and calques of the Greek language and word order in Greek manner at that time is not a rarity in hymnography. This trend is observed in George the Athonite's original chants too. Against this background the most important merit of Ioane Minchkhi's hymns is their language –

impeccable old Georgian. There is no trace of the foreign language interference and none of the artificial constructions taken from the foreign language shadow this great poetry. Old Georgian vocabulary, syntax, construction of the phrase make Ioane Minchkhi's hymns chrestomatic samples of the Georgian language. This must have been well-noticed by X century Georgian readers.

The study of Minchkhi's creativity makes it clear that the general rule of his creative work lies in striving for the "protovision" of the traditional material. In this respect special attention should be paid to the last troparion of Minchkhi's, one of the small-sized hymns (first Tuesday Matins) which represents a poetic remake of the most traditional prayer of Christian liturgy – *The Lord's Prayer (Our Father...)*. Such cases in the history of hymnography are rather scarce. It is interesting to note that Ioane Minchkhi managed to create his method of rhythmic and melodic metres in the most canonic sphere of the medieval spiritual poetry.

The majority of Ioane Minchkhi's small-sized hymns contain the indications to appropriate heirmoi but the 23 stichera are included in the manuscripts without such indications. They begin directly with full texts of troparions. Many of them in the manuscript come with an indication – "Idiomela" [7, p.135]. Among Georgian hymnographers Ioane Minchkhi is the only author whom a number of "Stichera Idiomela" belongs to. With these stichera he introduced new verse metres and new melodies into Georgian hymnography. It seems the first troparions of these stichera were canonized as heirmoi in later Georgian hymnography. The first troparions of Minchkhi's "Stichera Idiomela" appeared to have entered as heirmoi in a number of Georgian manuscripts - S 425, A 85, K564, Ath.86 and Q 298. The mentioned manuscripts date back to the X -XIX centuries and belong to different collections. It seems that the establishment of new rhythmic and melodic metres as heirmoi started in the 10th century and continued over the centuries [7, pp.136-141].

The establishment of the original metres in the repertoire of heirmoi, in the highly regulated sphere of hymnography can be considered to be an unconventional recognition of Ioane Minchkhi's

creative work by his contemporaries and successors. Ioane Minchkhi is the only author among Georgian hymnographers who created a great number of original heirmoi. On the basis of these "Stichera Idiomela" many Georgian chants were created and for their authors Minchkhi's poetic world must have been one of the main sources of inspiration.

Original rhythmic and melodic metres introduced into Georgian hymnography by Minchkhi were established without any special term. The terminology in the manuscripts related to Minchkhi (Minchkhni, Minchkhisani, Minchkhuri) denotes only Minchkhi's sole authorship. Along with small-sized hymns Ioane Minchkhi's heritage revealed by us contains two hymnographic Canons. These Canons by Minchkhi were written for especially important feasts of the Holy Lent - Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday. Both of them are distinguished by lyricism typical of Minchkhi.

Thus, two new Canons are added to six hymnographical Canons by Minchkhi already known in scholarly literature from other manuscripts. The newly added canons connect Ioane Minchkhi's creativity more closely with the first Georgian Lenten Triodion.

Along with small-sized hymns and hymnographical canons in Georg.5 one more group of hymns bears the inscription of Minchkhi's name - eight troparions, which represent II Odes for the Georgian translations of the Canons composed by Byzantine hymnographers. These Canons in Georg. 5 are inscribed under the names of Elia, Cosmas and Theophanes.

Georgian translations of these Canons preserved in the X century Sinaitic Tropologions, Sin.5 and Sin.75 manuscripts and Georg. 5 differ from each other by redaction. The Georgian translation of the mentioned Canons must have been filled with Ioane Minchkhi for the first Georgian Triodion separated from Tropologion as an independent collection with which his creativity was so much connected.

Thus, the study of George the Athonite's Lenten Triodion has revealed a previously unknown sphere of Ioane Minchkhi's

hymnographic activity – his contribution to the II Odes of the Canons. As is known, a peculiar history of the II Odes of the hymnographical Canons has long been a subject of scholarly interest. The ancient Georgian sources are of great importance regarding their history as the Byzantine hymnography of relevant periods, as a rule, represents the origin of the processes taking place in Georgian hymnography.

From the 50s of the X century the completion of the Canons with II Odes started in Georgian hymnography which must have reflected the ongoing processes in Greek hymnography.

Thus, Ioane Minchkhi did extremely difficult and purposeful work in Georgian hymnography. He is the author of a complete Stichera of the first Georgian Lenten Triodion presented as an independent collection from Tropologion. For this collection Ioane Minchkhi also created other essential components – the Canons for Lazar Saturday and Palm Sunday and the repertoire of the II Odes for the Canons translated from Greek. Thematic and phraseological unity of Minchkhi's hymns with the creations of Greek authors presented in the first Georgian Lenten Triodion also deserves attention. Taking into consideration all these facts, arguably, Ioane Minchkhi must be an editor and a compiler of the first Georgian Lenten Triodion. Minchkhi is the only author among Georgian hymnographers who conducted such voluminous and complex work. The first Georgian Triodion laid the foundation to the following redactions of this collection and Minchkhi's "Stichera Idiomela" were established as heirmoi in Georgian hymnography.

Minchkhi's great contribution to the formation of Georgian Triodion is precisely expressed by George the Athonite – a prominent scholar of Georgian and Byzantine writing whose works usually include small number of Georgian chants. These chants, if we repeat George the Athonite's words, are "absolutely perfect and desired". Thus, in the most authoritative circles of XI century Georgia Ioane Minchkhi enjoyed special recognition.

The influence of Ioane Minchkhi's creativity on the subsequent Georgian poetry is great. Mikael Modrekili who lived and worked in the second half of the X century created a

hymnographical Canon according to Ioane Minchkhi's rhythmic and melodic metres which the latter introduced in the Canon to St. George [1, pp.133-135]. As is seen, the metre introduced by Minchkhi in this hymn was quickly established as heirmoi. Ioane Minchkhi's hymns became one of the inspiring sources to Demetre-Damiane's *Shen Khar Venakhi (Thou Are a Vineyard)* [6, pp.100-102]. The influence of Ioane Minchkhi's creative work on David IV the Builder's (David Aghmashenebeli) hymnographic masterpiece *Hymns of Repentance* is obvious. Ioane Minchkhi's creativity is one of the main sources also for Rustaveli's poem *The Man in the Panther Skin*.

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