Демесневое многоголосне

№ 25. Днесь Христос в Вифлееме раждается

Demestvenny Polyphony

XVII в. /17th c.

Днесь Христос в Вифлееме раждается

Dnes Hristos v Vilejeme razhdayetsa

Today Christ is Born in Bethlehem

Today Christ is born in Bethlehem of a virgin;
today the One who has no beginning begins to be;
and the Word becomes flesh;
and the Earth with mankind makes merr;
the Magi bring the Master gifts;
and we cry out without ceasing:
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,
good will towards men!"

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Демественное многоголосие
№ 25. Днесь Христос в Вифлееме раждается
Demestvenn Polyphony
XVII в. / 17th с.

Днесь Христос в Вифлееме раждается
Today Christ Is Born in Bethlehem

Dnie Христов v Vifleye nem razdajetsja
Today Christ is born in Bethlehem of a virgin;

today the One who has no beginning begins to be,
and the Word becomes flesh;
and the Earth with mankind makes merr;
the Magi bring the Master gifts;
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NOTES

(This is an authorized offprint from One Thousand Years of Russian Church Music: 988–1988, Volume 1 in the series Monuments of Russian Sacred Music (Musica Russica, 1991—). For a general explanation of the editorial principles and a key to the abbreviations used below, please refer to the aforementioned volume.)

“Деиста Христова Вифлеемская” (“Today Christ is born in Bethlehem”) is the doxastikon (slavek) at the Praises for the feast of the Nativity of Christ—a sticheron sung after the verse “Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit” at the end of a cycle of stichera. In the scheme of early Russian church singing, the doxastika were sung either in particular and solemn chants (demosnenny, put', or great znammenny) or, as in the case of the present example, in polyphony.

The method of “direct” deciphering according to the cinnabar markings yields an erroneous picture of the style of early Russian polyphony: a consistently dissonant sonority, which contradicts, on the one hand, the consonant nature of Russian folk polyphony (the aesthetic of which could not have failed to influence the auditory experience and artistic criteria of professional singer-composers) and, on the other hand, the entire tonal structure of ancient Russian chant. Our research with monuments of monnosty and demestveny polyphony has convinced us of the fact that the apparent “dissonance” is merely the result of incorrect deciphering, and not an inherent stylistic trait of Russian polyphony.

The rhythmic aspect of the deciphering process served as the foundation for transcribing its pitch aspect. Our research showed that znammenny polyphony contained a system of “peregrine (alien) markings” (stranaie pometi) and other graphic means of indicating various types of mutation (modulation), which caused the transposition of certain passages within a composition. In addition, in demestvenny scores, we identified a whole set of unique combinations of pitch notation the meaning of which is also not always clear. These include: the sign "9" and a number of other terms and signs. We set forth the hypothesis that the sign "9" is a graphic representation of the "vocal line" (arka peremenno), which serves as the orientation point for pitch relationships among the signs of znamenny notation. It follows, therefore, that among the "lines" of each voice there had to exist certain natural principles, which determined the pitch relationships of all the voices. Based on the above assumption, we experimented with the transposition of individual portions of a given hymn, guided by the graphic indicators of transposition — the "peregrine markings" and the sign "9."

Source: [“Деиста Христова Вифлеемская” (“Today Christ is born in Bethlehem”)]. GPB, OSRK Q, L189. Noted Feasts, f. 98 v. -99 v. End of the 17th c.: 15.4 × 15.0 cm. 267 ff. Watermarks: type Heawood No. 433 (1681), Dian. No. 482 (1680–1689), No. 483 (1680), type Dian. No. 485 (1674). The text is poluslovov in various hands and cursive; new "true speech." The musical notation is demestveny with cinnabar marks. The demestvenny scores for three voices comprise stichera and stichera after "Glory" (slavek) for the twelve major feasts.

Transcribed by L. Yefimova. First publication.

—L. Yefimova