

ON THE ISSUE OF POLYMODALITY AND COMPLEMENTARY RHYTHMS IN THE VOCAL *SUTARTINĖS* PLAYED ON THE PSALTERY *KANKLĖS*

Martin Boiko

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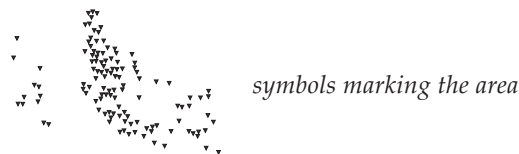
The most exotic phenomenon in Baltic traditional music is undoubtedly the Lithuanian *sutartinės* polyphony. Most of the songs that are named *sutartinės*, are characterized by the following features:

- 1) equal importance of parts,
- 2) predominance of seconds in the harmony,
- 3) polymodality,
- 4) complementary rhythms,
- 5) crossing of parts,
- 6) simultaneous performance of different texts.

For several decades this style has been a thing of the past. Already in the 1930s, when most documentation of the *sutartinės* was made, they existed mainly in postfunctional form. But in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, their area comprised a large territory in northeastern Lithuania. (See Fig. 1.)

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Fig. 1. Area of the *sutartinės* polyphony



Two basic formal types – the canonic and antiphonal *sutartinės* – can be distinguished. As a typical representative of the *sutartinės* polyphony an antiphonal example, the dance song *Du ažuolu* (*Two Oak Trees*) from the northern part of the area is quoted in example 1. Two alternating pairs of singers perform it. The melostrophe consists of a section sung by the first pair and its repetition by the second pair. All the typical features of the *sutartinės* are represented in the example. Both parts are equally important. (They are to the last detail mutually coordinated.) The main principle of the part-leading is crossing of parts. The rhythmic structure is determined by the principle of complementary rhythms. The polymodality is represented in the most typical form of the *sutartinės* – as a combination of two bichords: the 1st part uses the bichord B flat–D, the 2nd the bichord C–E. (Two modal centres, two different modal stratum exist simultaneously.) The textual structure has a vertical aspect: this is something that could be called ‘simultaneity of different texts’ or ‘heterotextuality’. The text of the 1st part in each pair tells the story of the song. In each next melostrophe a new fragment of the narrative appears in this part. The main feature of the text of the 2nd part is its regular recurrence. It becomes repeated in each next stanza without any change.

Example 1

1. Du c - zuo - lu, ly - lo, Tre - aia lie - pa, ly - lo.

Lioi, du c - zuo - lu, Uj tre - aia lie - pa. etc.

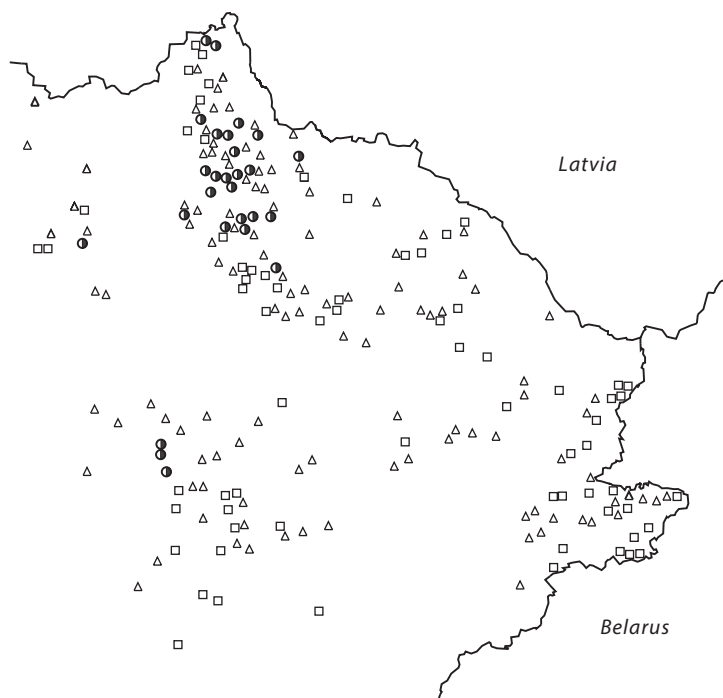
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Lioi, du c - zuo - lu, Uj tre - aia lie - pa.

Unlike other forms of Baltic vocal polyphony, the *sutartinės* show a vocal-instrumental parallelism: in some areas of northeastern Lithuania, beside the vocal, also the instrumental performance of the *sutartinės* was practised. The vocal-instrumental parallelism does not mean that two independent branches – a vocal and an instrumental – existed in the respective local *sutartinės* repertoires, but that a *sutartinė* could be performed both in an instrumental and a vocal way, depending on the situation, conditions and intention of the performers. (About the vocal-instrumental parallelism see: Apanavičius & Baltrėnienė 1991, Boiko 1996:117–123, Paliulis 1959 and 1984.) In the instrumental performance of *sutartinės* mostly wind instruments were used: sets of the single-note flutes *skudučiai*, long wooden trumpets *daudytės*, recorders *lumzdeliai*, more seldomly idioglot folk clarinets *birbynės*. One finds also instances of the performance of the *sutartinės* on the psaltery *kanklės*. The ethnomusicological research has almost 800 documentations of the *sutartinės* at its disposal. Indications

of parallel existence in a vocal and an instrumental version are found in circa 140 cases and in 27 places – villages and isolated farms. (See Fig. 2.) In ten of those places, the vocal-instrumental parallelism can be established for the entire *sutartinės* repertoire.

Fig. 2. *Vocal-instrumental parallelism. Places of documentation*



● places of documentation of the vocal-instrumental parallelism

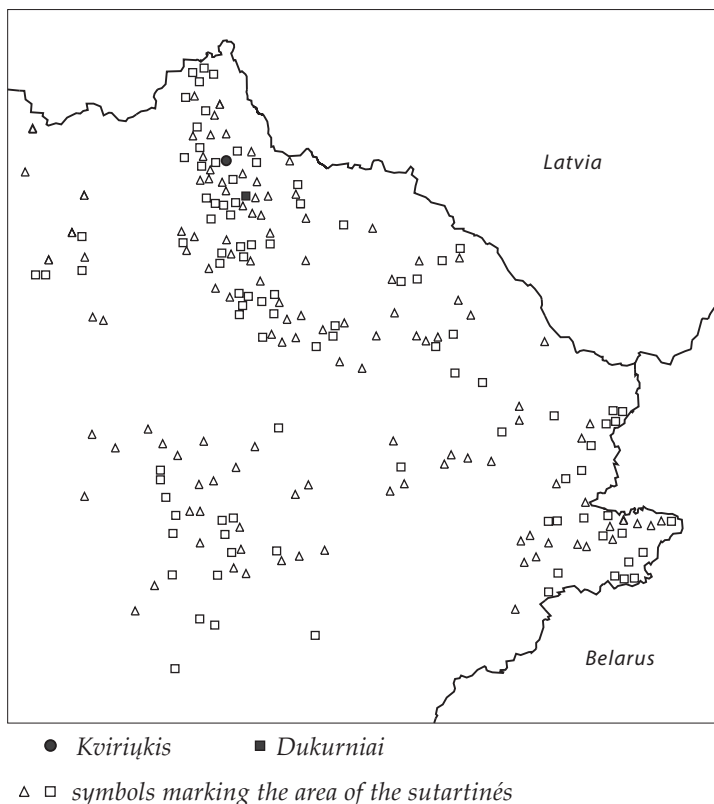
Δ □ symbols marking the area of the sutartinės

The 140 documentary items indicating the vocal-instrumental parallelism are not of equal quality. A small part of them are phonograph recordings (with transcriptions) of normal instrumental performance. A further category are field transcriptions of the *sutartinės* performance on the wind instruments made after the playing of a single musician demonstrating the parts one after the other. The third group represents transcriptions of vocal performance supplied by statements of singers that the respective *sutartinė* can be performed also in an instrumental way. And finally there is a small group of field transcriptions documenting vocal performance as well: information about the instrumental performance of the respective pieces is known thanks to the comments made by third persons. The question remains open to what extent the documents of the third and fourth group can be regarded as characterising the practice of the instrumental *sutartinės* performance.

20 from circa 140 documentary items reflect the performance of the *sutartinės* on the psaltery *kanklės*. These 20 are phonograph recordings and their transcriptions, documenting the repertoire of two musicians:

Petras Lapienė from the farm Kviriškis and Jonas Plepas (Plepys) from the villages Dukurniai in the northern part of the area. (See Fig. 3.) Recordings were made in 1935 (Dukurniai) and 1937 (Kviriškis). Musicologist Jadvyga Čiurlionytė (1899–1992) and composer Vytautas Paltanavičius (1924–1994), recognised experts in Lithuanian traditional music, prepared the transcriptions.

Fig. 3. Villages Kviriškis and Dukurniai within the sutartinės area



Example 2a, the war song *Du žaliūs berželiai* (*Two Green Birch Trees*) played by Plepas, gives a general idea about the performance of the *sutartinės* on *kanklės*. The problem that arises is that what one can see in the transcription (and would hear when the phonograph recording would be played) does not remind us of a *sutartinė*. It does not make the impression of a polyphonic, polymodal and polyrhythmic phenomenon at all. What one has here is heterophony with branching of the melody at the beginning of each bar. Nevertheless, this piece contains the entire substance of a polymodal *sutartinė*: both modal stratum is included in it, and even the complementary rhythmic order is preserved. This can be easily established through the following procedures. The scale of example 2a consists of the notes G–A–B–C#–D#. If one undertakes the structuring of scale and substance of the example following the polymodal patterns used in the *sutartinės*, the result is a construction consisting of two modal stratum: A–C# and G–B–D# (see example 2b). If one undertakes further the

rhythmic structuring by projecting the complementary rhythmic patterns of the *sutartinės* on the result of the modal structuring, a characteristic polyrhythmic configuration arises (see example 2c). The result of both procedures is a typical *sutartinė*, and the conclusion that the components making up a polymodal and polyrhythmic *sutartinė* are in a hidden form present in the apparently heterophonic structure of the *kanklės* performance. And finally the verification: example 2d shows the transcription of the real *sutartinė* *Du žaliūs berželiai* (*Two Green Birch Trees*) as it was performed by a group of singers and recorded in 1935. It is not absolutely identical with the reconstructed *sutartinė* (2c), but the differences (in scale, form and rhythm) are insignificant and do not disturb the recognition of the result of the reconstruction being close to version of 2d. The musical material quoted in 2d, or material very similar to this, was obviously the prototype of the *kanklės* performance.

Example 2

Example 2 consists of four parts (a, b, c, d) of musical notation. Part (a) is a single melodic line in 2/4 time with a tempo marking of quarter note = 76. Part (b) shows two staves with a complex polyrhythmic pattern. Part (c) is another melodic line in 2/4 time. Part (d) is a vocal transcription with lyrics in Lithuanian. The lyrics are: "Du ža - liūs ber - žė - liai Kal - ne - ly uz - au - go, Kal - ne - ly uz - au - go. Tė - to, tė - to, Tė - to ly - lio, Tė - to ly - lio. etc. Du ža - liūs Tė - to,". The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals.

The fact that the entire substance of a polytonal and polyrhythmic *sutartinė* is represented in the *kanklės* piece under discussion, but that it is impossible to establish polymodality, complementary rhythms and, thus, the polyphony by listening to its recording (and that therefore these qualities are not reflected in its transcription), gives rise to questions concerning perception and playing technique. Above all it must be stressed, that for the musician himself, the polymodality, complementary rhythms and, thus, the polyphony was present in his performance. He intentionalised it when performing. Otherwise it is hard to understand, why the substance of the *sutartinė* is so complete and well preserved in the apparently heterophonic structure of the *kanklės* piece. It seems that there are two complementary

reasons of our inability to establish the polymodality, etc., in the process of listening (and transcribing):

- 1) lack of experience: if we were representatives of the tradition under discussion perhaps we would be able to listen to the respective polyphonic song „out“ of the *kanklės* sounds;
- 2) one has to take into consideration that the dynamic and melodic distinction of parts, the „not-let-them-flow-together“ on a five-string psaltery is a very complex task, and that the playing technique used by the *kanklės*-player could not possibly support the distinction, because he „[...] plays without stopping the strings, so that all the time, the sound of two or three strings can be heard“ (Slaviūnas 1959:681, note No 1554).

The reconstruction technique shown in example 2 can easily be used to transform the documented *kanklės* pieces into vocal *sutartinės* and, vice versa, the vocal *sutartinės* into their instrumental versions performable on the *kanklės*. This could give a stimulus to the revival movement to enlarge its *sutartinės* repertoire in both directions.

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