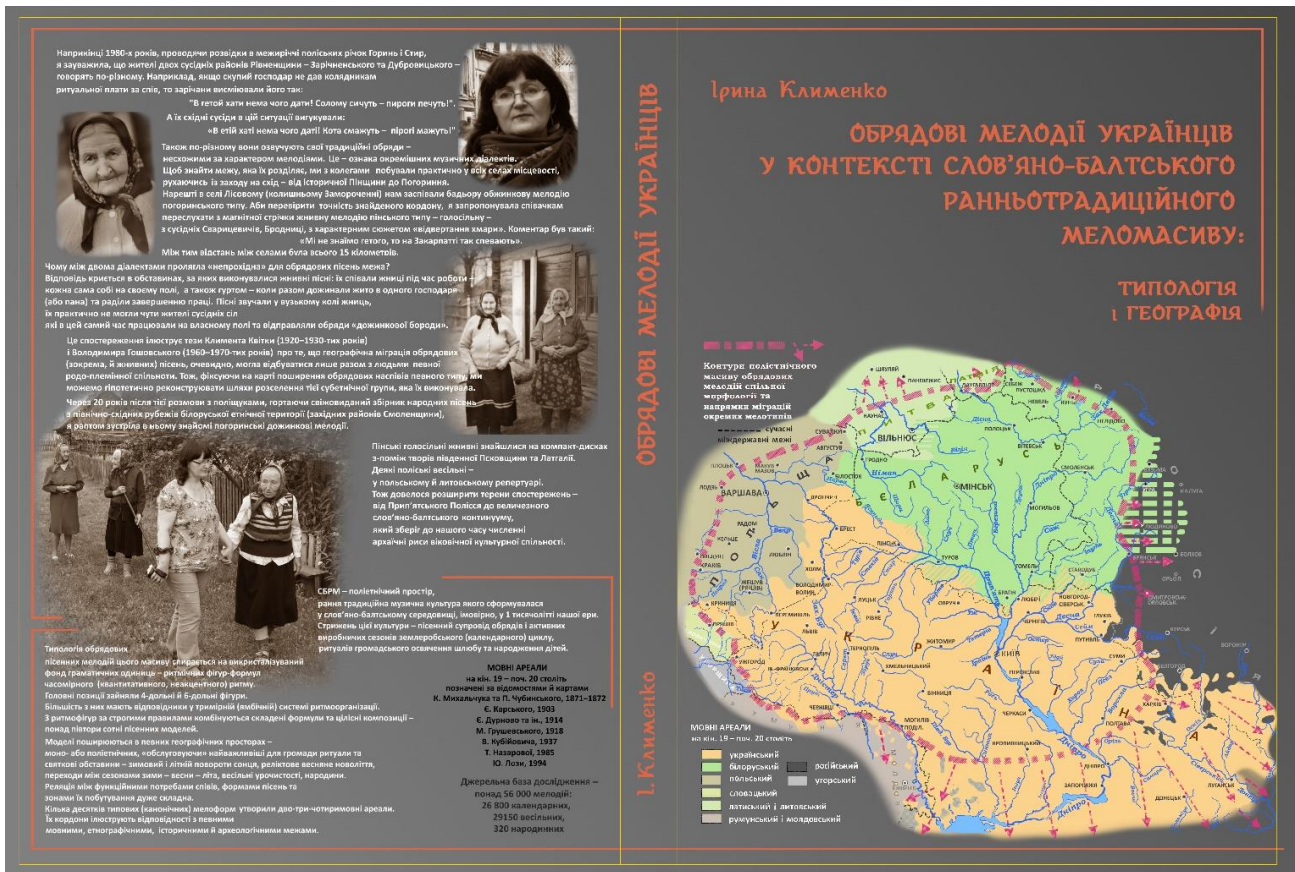


UDC 781.7:784.4][=161.2)(02)](049.32)
DOI: 10.31318/2522-4190.2023.137.294672

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**BOOK REVIEW: “RITUAL MELODIES OF UKRAINIANS IN THE
CONTEXT OF SLAVIC-BALTIC EARLY TRADITIONAL
MELODIC AREAL” BY IRYNA KLYMENKO**



Iryna Klymenko’s book¹ offers a significant contribution to ethnomusicological science by introducing a new classification and analysis of Ukrainian ritual songs. By examining the fundamental patterns that form the basis of these songs, Dr. Klymenko provides important insights into their structure and emotional impact capacity. The patterns possess a contagious quality, leaving a lasting impression on listeners and evoking strong emotional responses.

¹ Климєнко І. Обрядові мелодії українців у контексті слов'яно-балтського ранньотрадиційного меломасиву: типологія і географія. Київ: Національна музична академія України імені П. І. Чайковського, 2020. Т. 1: Монографія, 360 с. Т. 2: Атлас, 100 с. + DVD

When shared within the community during rituals and family events, these songs foster a sense of collective identity and shared experiences. Through the study of ritual songs, Dr. Klymenko identifies enduring musical archetypes that have likely persisted for centuries, shedding light on the historical development of Ukrainian collective musical consciousness.

One of the remarkable features of this book is its extensive data analysis and attention to detail. Klymenko's meticulous examination of approximately 56,000 songs ensures statistically meaningful sample sizes for the various song groups analyzed. While computers were used for word processing and database creation, the core analysis and feature extraction were carried out using human intelligence, highlighting the author's prodigious scholarly expertise.

The book's core chapters, 5 to 16, provide a comprehensive exploration of Ukrainian ritual songs. Klymenko establishes a general theory on rhythm and melody formation (Ch. 5, 6), investigates the ethnographic context of ritual song creation (Ch. 7), and applies these principles to analyze wedding songs (Ch. 8). Subsequent chapters delve into the significance of these melodies in calendar rituals tied to the agricultural cycle and winter holidays (Ch. 9–12). Through comparative and cross-genre analysis, Klymenko uncovers distinctive characteristics unique to each genre and geographic region (Ch. 13–16). Detailed maps (v. 2) show the areas of proliferation for each pattern.

In comparison to English-language ethnomusicology research, this book stands out for its analytical focus and expands upon the deep analytical work conducted by Ukrainian and Russian scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries. In contrast, English language contemporary studies often emphasize the social and cultural contexts of traditional musical art. Two examples of influential recent studies much admired by the author of this review, are “The Music of Central Asia”¹, and “Music of Bulgaria” by Timothy Rice².

To quote from the private communication by Prof. Theodore Levin, “...data set-based analysis of style characteristics lost popularity among ethnomusicologists working in the USA, who tend to gravitate more toward critical engagement with music in its social and cultural context. However, with the recent turn toward digital humanities and musical applications of generative AI, I suspect we'll see an uptick in the use of large music data sets for style analysis in the near future.”

It should be mentioned here that there exists a computational ethnomusicology community.³ It would be an exaggeration, however, to call computational musicology a part of the mainstream. We believe that Dr. Klymenko's emphasis on musical analysis should provide a refreshing perspective to members of the international ethnomusicology community. This approach opens new avenues for future research, particularly in exploring connections between Eastern European ritual songs on the one hand, and the folk traditions of the Mediterranean region, and Steppe Regions of Western Eurasia on the other hand.

Beyond its academic value, the book appeals to various audiences. The first category of potential users comprises Ukrainian ethnomusicologists and their colleagues from neighboring countries in Eastern Europe. For them, Klymenko's work serves as a foundational resource and provides numerous opportunities for future research. The book's meticulous classification and analysis of Ukrainian ritual songs will undoubtedly influence the development of 21st-century East European ethnomusicology.

¹ Levin, T., Daukeyeva, S. and Köchümkulova E. (eds.) (2016). *The Music of Central Asia*. Indiana University Press.

The companion web site for the book is <https://www.musicofcentralasia.org/>

² Rice, T. (2003). *Music of Bulgaria*. Oxford University Press.

³ See, e.g.

<https://www.upf.edu/web/xavier-serra>,

<https://www.uni-potsdam.de/en/soundscapelab/computational-ethnomusicology/why-computational-why-georgia>

<https://computationalethnomusicology.wordpress.com/>

The second category includes Ukrainian performers who seek to preserve and honor the authentic musical traditions of their heritage. Alongside field recordings and performance videos, this book serves as a valuable companion, offering insights into the underlying structures and emotional resonance of ritual songs. Moreover, the accompanying video lectures on the Rys Project¹ provide a good non-technical introduction into the theory. For this group of potential users, it would be helpful to illustrate the use of melo-rhythmical forms with audio-visual examples and provide detailed guidance on microtonality, thus enriching the practical application of this musical knowledge.

The third group comprises ethnomusicologists from Western Europe, North America, and other regions. The book's material provides a rich source of exploration and cross-cultural analysis. Of particular interest is the potential for uncovering commonalities between Eastern European ritual songs and the folk musical traditions of the Mediterranean region. Additionally, the book highlights the missed opportunity to study the music of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples who once inhabited the South and East of present-day Ukrainian territory, such as the Alans, Huns, Kipchaks, and Nogais. Despite the lack of surviving oral traditions, the book may induce researchers to consider the musical connections and influences that may have existed.

The fourth category of potential users encompasses musical artists working in academic and popular music spheres. The patterns and formulas presented in the book serve as building blocks for creating original compositions. The enduring nature of these formulas makes them particularly appealing for artistic endeavors. Artists can explore innovative approaches by combining fragments of authentic recordings with their original music, thus introducing Ukrainian traditional music to a broader global audience. A condensed version of the theory aimed at artists, available in English and other languages, would facilitate the popularization of Ukrainian traditional music worldwide.

In the broader context of world music history, Klymenko's work represents a significant step towards the axiomatization of an oral musical tradition. The closest historical analogy here is Makam in music of Western and Central Asia. Makam was invented in the late Middle Ages by theoreticians seeking new uses for ancient oral traditions. The system of Makam consists of a list of rhythm patterns (*usul*), a list of elementary tri-, tetra- and pentachords (*cin*), and a list of rules for melody development. The terms here refer to Turkish Makam, in which the above building blocks are combined to form about 200 actual Makam sequences (these can be called modes, but this is not entirely accurate). Drawing parallels to the concept of Makam, Klymenko's classification opens up intriguing possibilities for integrating rural traditions into contemporary urban settings, enriching the cultural landscape of modern society. Much like Makam provides rules for combining structures from folk music to create larger forms, improvisation, and mixed group performances, the same principles can be applied to Ukrainian ritual songs, thereby revitalizing and integrating them into modern cultural contexts.

In conclusion, "Ritual Melodies of Ukrainians in the Context of Slavic-Baltic Early Traditional Melodic Areal" stands out as an important scholarly contribution to the field of ethnomusicology. Klymenko's meticulous classification and analysis of Ukrainian ritual songs, along with its potential for future research and practical applications, ensure its relevance and lasting impact. By exploring the rich musical heritage of Ukraine, this book not only deepens our understanding of a specific cultural tradition but also contributes to the broader discourse on the preservation, revitalization, and integration of traditional music in the modern world.

Acknowledgments. The author is indebted to Prof. Theodore Levin (Dartmouth College, USA) and Prof. Xavier Serra (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Catalonia, Spain) for information and helpful discussions. The editorial assistance from GPT-4 is gratefully acknowledged.

¹ Website: <https://rysproject.com/>