

## Woman and Music Tradition: Vocal Singing in the Ritual of Henna Night

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper research traditional female singing among the Turkish population in the western rural parts of the R. Macedonia. Due to the location, high level of physical, cultural and linguistic isolation contributed to the strong cohesion of this woman with the community and inherited patriarchal matrix. Although the acceptance of some urban elements of living narrow the repertoire, female singing in the henna night is still a vital factor because of its context of woman's contribution in maintaining the social life and cultural integration.*

*Keywords: Female traditional singing, Turkish population, R. Macedonia.*

### Introduction

Musical tradition of the Turkish population in the western rural parts of the Republic of Macedonia is still one of the vital factors that continuously sublimate and bring forth the events of the rich long-lived history. The high degree of physical, cultural and linguistic isolation, due to geographical location (high mountain area – 1170 m), resulted in more pronounced community cohesion and greatly contributed to longer preservation of musical heritage. If music practice is considered as a special tool for maintaining and stimulating the basic gender values, then the pillar of vocal music in this population is precisely the woman. Female vocal tradition has been unchanged for centuries and contributes to maintenance of social life and community integration. Still, each generation accepts music tradition in consistency with inherited social patterns and passes it through the filter of changes created by current social conditions.

However, migration from village to city, migrant work, acceptance of new technological tools greatly contribute to the faster changing of this musical repertoire, replacing the local traditional songs with the popular Turkish folk music. The field

research showed that in practice the women's labor and lament songs are almost forgotten, while lyric traditional local songs are still living and they are transmitted as an unavoidable segment in the weddings. This most important secular event still consists of the largest number of ritual (Coloring, Taking the dowry, Henna night, Taking the bride, Shaving the groom, etc.) based on the apotropaic character in which the music contributes to emphasizing the dramatic nature of these rituals.

In this paper, we are focusing precisely on the local music repertoire in the Henna night, because, the traditional female singing has still formally and functionally preserved its authenticity. The methodology of this case study included participatory observation of multiple collective gatherings, digitization, melography, data analysis process and application of a visual method. The survey also used a non-direct interview, conducted individually and in groups with a large number of informants.

### **Henna night**

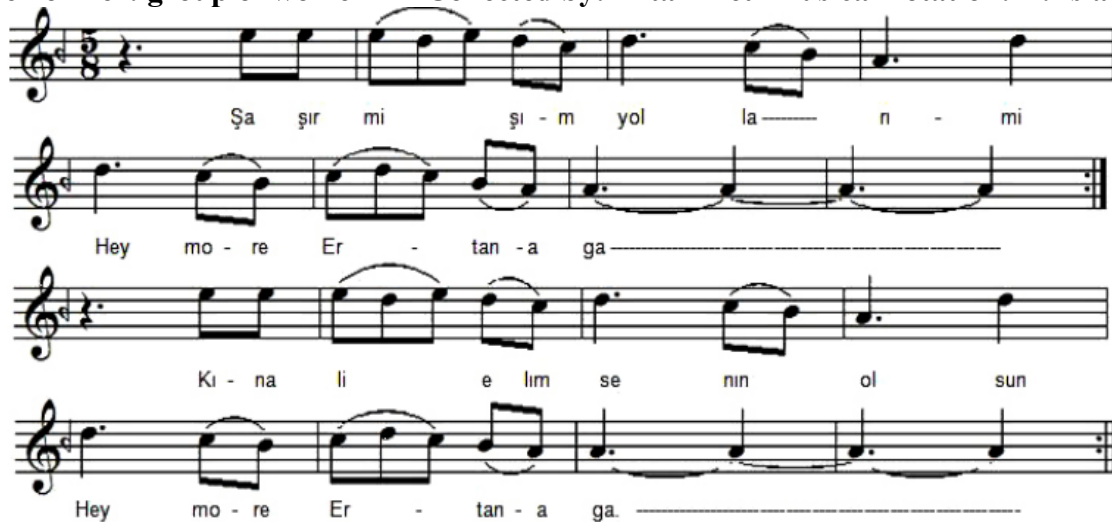
On Henna night of the Turkish population in the western rural parts of the Republic of Macedonia, only women participate in the act of placing, called burning of henna on hands and feet (Tur. kına yakmak). They sing songs with sad content as a symbol of sadness because of the girl's departure from her father's house. The ritual that is performed in the bridal home is extremely important considering that it has its own distinctive elements and can also be used as a distinctive traditional ritual symbolizing protection against spells. The belief of a woman concerning the dominance of the red color of henna, as well as the bride's veil and the wrapping materials around hands, is explained with an apotropaic and visual meaning—warm, bright and full of vividness, the color of the life force and energy.



**Photo 1.** Burning henna

The repertoire, which is usually sung with a rhythmic accompaniment of one or more daïres (tambourines), consists of the following songs: My henna hand (Kınalı Elim), Come on bride, come on daughter (Ayde Gelinim Ayde Be Kızım), Beautiful bride (Güzel Gelinim), My rose, aman (Oy Gül-üm Aman Aman), To plant a rose at vineyard (Gül Dikeyim Bağlara), Trays with candies (Tepsi Tepsi Şekerler), Why are you sad (Ne Mahzun Durursun), Mother, they took me away (Aldiler Beni Annem), I shall come to you, beautiful bride (Gelirim Sana Güzel Gelinim). These songs are with attributes intended for capturing ambient function and are characterized by a special style of singing and aesthetics

**Performer:** group of women      **Collected by:** Ertan İzeti **Musical notation:** A. İslam



**Figure 1.** Kınalı Elim (My henna hand)

Characteristic of this repertoire is that the melody creates foundation of the performance and dominates the text. Therefore, pronunciation of some words becomes incomprehensible, which represents a stylistic feature of a group singing. Also, this repertoire is sung in some of the rituals of the pre-wedding preparations, such as traditional bread kneading, painting the hair of the bride, wearing gifts, and so on. (informant S. Gotak, April 2015).

### **Musical characteristics of the repertoire**

Observed from the aspect of music performance, this repertoire consists of vocal music in the form of a turku (Turk. türkü). According to its origins, this musical repertoire consists mainly of local songs, some Rumelian and Turkish folk songs from the wider region. The traditional songs are spiritual monuments of the events and emotional states which during the history have left a strong impression on daily life of the population. Many of them are the basic foundation for female singing, which is most pronounced in the wedding rituals, especially on the Henna night.



**Photo 2.** Women singing and dancing

The form turku in the traditional songs of Kodzadzik differs from the turku in the Rumelian music of urban provenance, in terms of the poetic content and structure, as well as the musical structure. Regarding the musical form, most of them are one-part, and there are also several two-part songs, and from the poetic forms of folk literary work, the turk and mani are represented. These are works whose authors are anonymous and are transmitted through oral tradition. According to thematic content, they are mostly lyric and have their own story of creation. The songs are sung on the authentic Rumelian Yuruk dialect as a result of their isolated way of living far from the cities. The texts have a regular and irregular syllabic structure.

Some of them lack coherence in terms of the syllable structure or rhyme, as a result of spontaneous expressions of ordinary person's emotions, resulting in subtraction, addition of new or changing of some words in various interpretations, because of which the poetic shape as a whole is shifted. In some cases, the text change is due to adapting to the melody of the song. This phenomenon is a result of deformations that occur over time due to oral transmission of the work. Most characteristic songs of this kind are: Come on bride, come on daughter (13-11-15-11, 15-10-15-10), etc. As for the language of the songs, almost the whole repertoire is performed on a local Turkish dialect.

Performed: Emmine Adem

Collected by: A. Islam Melody notation: A. Islam

Ni - je gi der - sin gü - zel  
Tru - pi bur da - dir ge - li

oğ lum o a - yi - rak yer de  
ni min a - klı - dır sen de

gü - zel oğ lum  
gü - zel oğ lum

o a - yi - rak yer de  
a - klı - dır sen de

Figure 2. Güzel Gelinim (Beautiful bride)

The songs are based on the modal tonal sequences – makams characteristic of Turkish music, and they contain rather primitive melodic patterns, i.e. unprocessed modal melodic structure typical of Yuruk music. Unlike the songs from the wider urban Rumelian repertoire which most often contain the entire tonal range of the makam, and some of them even contain extensions, these songs do not contain all the tones of tonal sequences, i.e., the songs that are in the range of the initial part of the tonal sequence, tetrachord or pentachord, prevail, and some of them do not rely on a concrete makam. These tonal sequences have certain function and esthetics in creating a melody which sometimes sounds so melodious, although moving in only four or five tones, and sometimes, it is so lyrical as if it contains all the colors of nature – modest, and yet rich.

In most of the songs prevails the makam Ushak (Arab. aşık—in love), due to its character that is characterized by a warm lyricism. The second in representation is Hidjaz, which appears only in the form of tetrachord and pentachord. This makam is suitable for expressing warm feelings and it contains an increased second, which is a characteristic interval in the Turkish music. In the musical repertoire is represented symmetric and asymmetric usuls with the dominance of asymmetric rhythms—Turk Aksak 5/8, Devr-i Hindî 7/8; symmetric – Sofyan 4/4 and Nimsofyan 2/4. In general, the prevalence of asymmetric rhythm in the Rumelian music is largely due to the fact that this rhythm follows best the prosodic structure of poetic forms represented in the songs.



## **Conclusion**

Weddings represent the most important secular act of the Turkish population in the western rural parts of the R. Macedonia, which originate from the distant epoch of the patriarchal marital union. In all the complexity of the wedding, the henna night is an important ritual and still a vital factor because of the context of woman's contribution in maintaining social life and cultural integration as well as the inherited music performance. Hence, the female singing in the Hanna night is strictly preserved in the original function which makes the woman a pillar of the music tradition. This repertoire consists of vocal music in the form of a turku mainly of local songs, some Rumelian and Turkish folk songs from the wider region. The local musical repertoire consists mainly of monodic lyrical songs that have been transmitted for centuries through oral tradition. Regarding the musical form, the majority of songs are one-part, and of the poetic forms are represented turku and mani. The songs are sung on the authentic Rumelian Yörük dialect. In most of the songs the makam Ushak prevails, with the domination of asymmetric usuls. These songs have their own physiognomy which is reflected, above all, not in the external features of the folk melody, but in its inner emotional nature, and it fully corresponds to the ethno-psychological type of woman from this region.

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