



MUSICAL TRADITIONS

DISCOVERY, INQUIRY, INTERPRETATION, AND APPLICATION

XXVI European Seminar
in Ethnomusicology

HAS RCH

Musical Traditions

Discovery, Inquiry, Interpretation, and Application

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Tradition and Revival

How Do Musical Styles of the Karachays Living in Turkey Change?

János Sipos

János Sipos PhD is a senior researcher in the Institute of Musicology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences and a part time lecturer at the Liszt Ferenc University of Music, Budapest. His main area is the comparative research of the music of Turkic people. From 1987 he has spent all together almost 10 years among Anatolian Turks (also Alevi/Bektashi), Azeri, Karachay, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen people, recording, transcribing, and analyzing more than 10.000 songs. He is the author of 14 books in English, Turkish, and Hungarian languages, and is the founder of the ICTM study group *The Music of the Turkic-Speaking World*.

Abstract: It is out of the question that comparative folk music is not in its glory. However, this does not mean that we have to abandon it. The research on the social and cultural aspects of the music is very important indeed, but the examination of the music *per se* remains an unavoidable task of the ethnomusicologists. Nobody else can and will do it. This examination must be done in a wide, comparative environment. In this respect, Bartók's principles are illuminating, who started to study the folk music of the neighbouring and the kindred people simultaneously with his research on Hungarian folk music. He was fully aware of the fact that one can understand his own national music only by the acknowledgement of other peoples' music as well. The research among Turkic people has been important for Hungarians because several Turkic groups played an important role in the formation of the Hungarians, as well as of their culture and folk music. This initialized a long series of research, which was started by Bartók's Anatolian research, then continued by the Cheremis,

Chuvash, Tatar, and Bashkir collections of Vikár-Bereczki, and — from 1987 — it has been carried out among Turkish, Azeri, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Karachay people by me. This comparative investigation has some interesting aspects. First, there are no monographs on these peoples' music, at most short articles with only a few transcriptions if any. Besides, the ethnogenesis of these Turkic speaking people is very colourful, and the relation between their music is quite different from the relation between their languages. In my paper I report on a stage of this research series.

Keywords: ethnomusicology, Karachay, Malkar, Turkey, revival, musical analysis, migration.

I have been doing research since 2000 among Karachay people living in the northern slopes and valleys of the Caucasus Mountains and among Karachays who migrated to Turkey. During my fieldwork I made lots of interviews and I collected more than 1.300 melodies, which enables me to say a few words about the music of this people.

Huns, Bolgars, Khazars, and Alans took part in the formation of the Karachays, followed by a strong Kipchak Turkish influence in the 13th century. The role of the neighbouring Caucasian people was also very important in their ethnogenesis too, as it is proved by the significant Kabard, Chechen and Abkhaz linguistic influences in their Pontic-Caspian Kipchak language (TAVKUL 1993: 206–214).

Caucasian people have coexisted for centuries and developed a certain kind of common culture (TAVKUL 2009: 446–456). They easily join each other's weddings, because a good deal of their melodies and dances are similar or even identical, as I experienced it several times in the Caucasus Mountains and also in Turkey (see also GIPPIUS 1981). I was invited in 2005 to a wedding in a town called Eskishehir in Turkey. The groom was Karachay and the bride was Kabard. They sung the songs in Turkish a language every participant of the wedding party knew, and regardless of the nationality everybody knew the dances as well. However, as we will see soon, under the all-Caucasian music and dancing styles there are several layers specific to individual ethnic groups.

☞ *How did the Karachays get into Turkey?*

On the ‘foundation’ established by the local tribes creating the Kuban Culture in Central Caucasus, the ‘layer’ of the Cimmerian, Scythian, and Alan tribes was put around 3000 BC. Then, from the 3rd centuries AD, the ‘wall’ was erected with the bricks of the Hun-Bulgarian, Alan, and Khazar tribes. Then from the 13rd century the Kipchak tribes finished this phase of the Karachay ethnogenesis. After 1828 Karachays came under Russian rule. When in 1870 the land was redistributed, the parts with a fertile soil were allocated to tsarist officials, which caused the impoverishment and migration of many Karachay people. The first generation migrated to Turkey in 1904, and founded villages in the vicinity of Konya, Eskishehir, Afyon, and Ankara. The linguistic and cultural environment of the Anatolian villages was very different from the nomadic stock-raising culture in the Caucasus Mountains. The newcomers had serious problems of adaptation, and they withdrew into themselves to protect their culture — as my old Karachay informants told me. (Similarly to the case of other minorities in Turkey, the literature on their culture is very poor.)

Turkey got out of WWI with a weak economy and many problems, which influenced the situation of the Karachays as well. According to several interviews I made with Karachays living in Turkey, the second generation born in Turkey was concerned with the survival and so people began to abandon their tradition and to forget their old songs. During the 1960s and 1970s the third generation turned towards the ancient tradition again. Among the oldest people and among the immigrants of WWII there were people whom it was possible to ask and learn from. Besides, in the 1970s Karachays began to come from the Soviet Union, e.g. to the Izmir International Fair, bringing different music on tapes and records with them. The Karachays living in Turkey were eager to copy these recordings and soon the melodies reached most of the houses and many people learned them.

In the 1990s with the disintegration of the Soviet Union it became even easier to get into contact with the Karachays living in the Caucasus, which strengthened the Karachay identity and the revival of the ancient culture. Of course this culture was not deeply embedded in the everyday life, it

lived mainly in the framework of festivals. E.g. there is a festival held every year in Yazilikaya village with Karachay people joining in from all over the world. The social environment where the Caucasian culture came into being and used to live, has changed significantly.

The older people considered these songs Russian-like and different from the old melody stock. The subject of the criticism was not the musical structure of the melodies as they did not have the proficiency to judge this, but the interpretation and the sounding. On the other hand youngsters grown up on pop music were fond of this variegated, vividly orchestrated musical material furnished with harmonies. Many of them learned and sung the melodies, and accompanied themselves with guitar. From here there was only a single step and this music was played at weddings, and in many places it obtained hegemony. This was facilitated by the fact that during festivities members of the younger generation played, sung, and danced, while old people would usually sit in silence.

There are two phenomena which differentiate Karachay music from Anatolian folk music at first sight: the use of the accordion, and a polyphonic vocal bourdon-accompaniment: the *eju*. Though Karachays consider the accordion and the *eju* national features, both of them can be traced back to Russian origin. The accordion preserves its importance even these days, though instead of the old *komuz* with buttons, the modern accordion, convenient for multifarious harmonization and played by professional musicians is gaining ground. On the other hand, within the Anatolian musical environment, which is basically monophonic, the polyphonic Karachay singing is gradually disappearing. Only old people can sing this way, but few of them can do it perfectly.

Evidently the music of the ancestors coming to Turkey contained several different layers, which went through an inner development reflecting the historical and musical influences in the 20th century. Now let us take a look at some Karachay musical layers concentrating on the fact how strongly they are represented in present day Karachay music.

≡ *Twin bar melodies*

Similarly to the Azeri, Anatolian or the Kazakh situation (SIPOS 2000, 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2010), the Koran is often recited on the *B flat-D-C* trichord and closes on C (Fig.1a). Similar musical forms can be seen in the children's songs of several people, but not in those of the Karachay. Though the *Ozay* and *Gollu* melodies of the primitive faith (SIPOS-TAVKUL 2012: 74) are plagal and are closing on C instead of turning up and down on a trichord, their characteristic melodic movement is a sinking down

Koran recitation



Ozay melody



Gollu melody



Fig. 1: a) Koran recitation, b) Ozay melody, c) Gollu melody.

followed by an ascent (Fig. 1b and c). Except for the Koran recitation none of these melodies are sung by the Karachays in Turkey.

☞ *Laments*

The Karachays in Turkey do not sing laments at all; not even the oldest people remember if they had ever heard one. This is all the more interesting because the musical forms of the laments are usually very stable and often they are effectively resistant to change. We know that in some Turkic cultures there are connections between the musical forms of the lament and those of the lullaby (SIPÓS 1994, 2000). And though we could not find laments, Karachay women do sing lullabies. In Fig. 2 we show a Karachay lullaby which is similar to the simplest tripodic Anatolian and Hungarian laments with its small-range sections descending to D or C.



Fig. 2: The skeleton of two-sectioned laments a) Karachay lament from Turkey, b) Hungarian lament.

☞ *Religious songs*

Women do not sing laments, but they sing religious melodies. Their Koran recitations of Arabic language called *zīkr* are very similar to that of the Anatolian Turks. However, there are *zīkr* melodies sung in Karachay language, different from the *zīkr* tunes of Arabic language. The

characteristics of these melodies are four short and descending sections with cadences on *D*, *B flat*, *B flat*, and *G* (Fig. 3). This melody form is widespread in the folk music of different Turkic people (SİPOŞ 2006: 311–319); probably an important layer of the Karachay folk music survives here in the guise of religious melodies.

The image displays four systems of musical notation, each consisting of two staves. The top staff of each system is labeled 'Karachay' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Turkish'. Both staves are in the key of B-flat major (two flats) and 8/8 time. The Karachay staves use a soprano clef, while the Turkish staves use a soprano clef with a one-line staff. The notation shows a series of notes and rests, with the Karachay version often featuring a dotted note and a final cadence. The Turkish version shows a similar melodic structure but with different rhythmic and melodic details.

Fig. 3: Karachay zikr melody and its Hungarian counterpart.

☞ *Lamenting and love song: the “jır”*

The tradition of singing laments and love songs is alive only among Karachays older than 50-60 years. The common characteristics of these melodies are:

- a) Four part musical structure with only a few typical cadence-series contrasting a great variety of melodic movements.
- b) Odd sections have 10, 11 or 12 syllables (their divisions being 5+5, 5+6, 6+5, and 6+6 respectively) while even sections have usually 8-syllables (divided in 3+2+3 or 5+3 syllables).
- c) The most typical time signature is 6/8.

Though these melodies serve as an important symbol of Karachay identity, they are widespread among Kabards and Ossets as well (see several melodies in GIPPIUS 1981). On the whole it is not unusual that — in order to represent their identity — people prefer complicated melodies to everyday folk songs. Karachays probably learned the *jırs* from their neighbours because this melody type is unknown in the folk music of other Turkic people. In Fig. 4 I show one of the most widespread representations of this musical style.

♩ = 108 *Jır (2a-1)*

Süy-ge-nim ji-ri-ñi men ay-tı-riq-ma.
Süy-mey-le se-ni teñ-le-riñ.
Baş-ha ja-tı-ña men qı-zın-ma-uç'-e'm
Ja-nı-mı aıv-mavd' köz-le-riñ. a.

Fig. 4: A Karachay “jır” melody.

☞ *Dance tunes*

Dance tunes usually change easily, so it is no wonder that this musical layer contains many melodies arriving from the former Soviet Union. However, in this quite heterogeneous repertoire there are several traditional melodies known and played by everybody. These melodies seem so deeply embedded in the Karachay musical sensitivity, that they could successfully survive newer waves and styles (Fig. 5). I would like to draw the attention

The figure displays three Karachay dance songs, each consisting of two staves of music in a single system. All three are in 4/4 time and the key of B-flat major (two flats).
 a) *Kar 2005 4/4*: The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The melody starts on G4, moves to A4, B4, and C5, then descends through B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, and B3. The second staff continues the melody with notes G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, and G2.
 b) *Kar 2005 4/5*: The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The melody starts on G4, moves to A4, B4, and C5, then descends through B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, and B3. The second staff continues the melody with notes G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, and G2.
 c) *Tkat 2005 4/6*: The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The melody starts on G4, moves to A4, B4, and C5, then descends through B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, and B3. The second staff continues the melody with notes G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, and G2.

Fig. 5: Three Karachay dance songs.

to the fact that the characteristic syncopation is absolutely foreign to the Anatolian musical renderings (SIPOS 1994, 1995, Fig. 6).

In a unique Karachay development the sections of the melody expand from the F-D-C trichord to B and G. An example to this is a popular Karachay *jir* song beginning similarly to the laments in Fig. 2, then its third and fourth sections jump down to the lower G, and finally the melody closes on C. As we see in Fig. 7, there are similar expansion in Hungarian (and Anatolian laments) as well.

The image displays four systems of musical notation, each consisting of two staves. The top staff of each system is labeled 'syncopation' and the bottom staff is labeled 'skeleton'. The music is written in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. The 'syncopation' staves show rhythmic deviations from the 'skeleton' staves, which provide a steady baseline. The first system shows a syncopated melody with eighth and quarter notes. The second system shows a syncopated melody with eighth notes and a quarter note. The third system shows a syncopated melody with eighth notes and a quarter note. The fourth system shows a syncopated melody with eighth notes and a quarter note, ending with a double bar line.

Fig. 6: An example of the syncopated performance, characteristic to the Karachay dance songs.

The figure displays four systems of musical notation, each consisting of two staves. The first system is labeled 'Karachay' and 'Hungarian'. The second system is unlabeled. The third system has a '+' sign above the top staff. The fourth system also has a '+' sign above the top staff. The notation includes treble clefs, various note values (quarter, eighth, sixteenth notes), rests, and accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals). The Karachay and Hungarian systems show a similar melodic structure with a downward extension. The third and fourth systems show more complex melodic lines with a '+' sign indicating a specific note or interval.

Fig. 7: Melodies with downward extension a) Karachay lament form Turkey, b) A Hungarian lament.

☞ *Summary*

Karachays in Turkey still resist the Anatolian melting pot. This is all the more remarkable as according to the official position not very long ago in Turkey everybody was supposed to be Turk; it was forbidden to write or publish in the languages of the minorities. Beginning with the 1990s, and especially in the last years, probably because of the requirements Turkey has to fulfil to become a member of the European Union, the strict prohibition was relaxed, and the ethnic diversity as well as the minority languages and cultures may manifest themselves better.

The Turcification is at an advanced stage among Karachays living in towns; many of them get married with Anatolian Turks, Cherkesses, and Adighes, and many children born in mixed marriage speak only Turkish. However, the majority of the Karachays living in small villages are bilingual and speaks the language of their ancestors, dance Karachay dances and sing Karachay songs. Their ethnic consciousness will probably be alive in Turkey for a long time, but most of their traditions survives only symbolically, within the framework of festivals. The most important carrier of the identity and culture, the Karachay language, is in slow erosion.

Except for the religious songs, elements of the traditional musical repertoire live only among older people, who do not have the occasion and mood to sing in public. The rather diverse material arriving from the Caucasus comes increasingly into prominence. However, this material differs significantly from the surrounding Anatolian musical environment and thus it can fulfil its function: helping to keep the Karachay ethnic consciousness alive for some time.

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