

Cultural Heritage of *Kopuz* (Lute) as a Folkloric Musical Instrument from the *Book of Dede Korkut* to Contemporary Times

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Abstract: Folklore as an oral tradition of literature plays a significant role in conveying the cultural legacy of a society from one generation to another. The current study investigates the cultural heritage of *kopuz* (lute) as a folkloric musical instrument in the Turkic folktale of the *Book of Dede Korkut*. In this folktale, *kopuz* (lute) is one of the sacred and oldest musical instruments of the Oghuz tribe. However, Dede Korkut as the main character of the stories is the inventor of Ashik (minstrel) musical poetry in Turkic-speaking communities. Thus, this research demonstrates the cultural legacy of *kopuz* (lute) in the *Book of Dede Korkut*'s stories, showing that the folkloric musical instrument plays a vital role in creating Ashik musical poetry in the Azerbaijani Turkic-speaking communities; in fact, this cultural heritage was flourished from the past and has been transmitted to the contemporary times of Turkic-speaking societies.

Keywords: Azerbaijani folktale, Turkic-speaking communities, *Book of Dede Korkut*, cultural heritage, musical instrument, *kopuz* (lute)

INTRODUCTION

The people of Azerbaijan have one of the richest and oldest sources of folktales in the Middle East. The roots of Azerbaijani folktales among Turkic-speaking communities are the hearts of the ordinary people of the society and have been transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to another. "Azerbaijan is one of the centers of the creation of folktales in the world" (Jafarzadeh 2014, 9). Besides, among the literary genres, the Azerbaijani folktales play a significant role in the Turkic-speaking communities. Thus, folktales of Azerbaijan in Turkic-speaking communities are divided into types: "Epic stories, Romances, and Stories that are told to children at the time of bed...; epic stories

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with gladiatorial loves and braveness and fight with kings, khans, and feudalism. A good example of this type can be the book of *Dede Korkut*” (Behrangi and Dehghani 1996, 6), which is “one of the most valuable and important masterpieces of the Turkish cultural world” (Duran and Tufan 2019, 37). The valuable collection of epos and stories in the *Book of Dede Korkut* represents the nomadic civilization of the life of the Oghuz Turks. “The origination of an earlier written Azeri literature can be safely traced back to the famous epic of *Dede Qorqut Kitabi* (the *Book of Dede Qorqud*), the narratives of which were orally materialized in pre-Islamic Caucasia and were written down around the 6th and 7th centuries” (Iloba George 2011, 83).

In the *Book of Dede Korkut*, the folkloric musical instrument *kopuz* (lute) plays a significant role in conveying the cultural heritage of the Turkic people. “Cultural heritage includes tangible and intangible form of cultural property” (Hussein 2011, 164). “Intangible heritage consists of the oral traditions, memories, languages, traditional performing arts or rituals” (Deacon et al 2004, 6). Thus, *kopuz* (lute) as a folkloric musical instrument of oral tradition is one of the intangible cultural heritages of Turkic-speaking communities.

The term *kopuz* (lute) is one of the oldest stringed instruments (*Saz* or *bağlama*) of Turkic people; in fact, a person who recites tales, poetry, and plays *kopuz* is called *Ozan* or *Ashik* (minstrel). Additionally, *kopuz* is a musical instrument that Turkic folk poets play while reciting their poems and singing songs at weddings, ceremonies, and other venues. *Kopuz* is one of the famous and national musical instrument that Turkic people uses it for fifteen century; some researchers argue that this folkloric musical instrument belongs to 8th and 9th centuries (Esin 2018, 536; Gazimihal 1975, 24). Erol asserts that “The *bağlama*, the general name of the long-necked lute, also called *saz*, was originally referred to as the *kopuz* in the 14th century book of *Dede Korkut*, and was found in various forms throughout the Turkic world” (Erol 2009, 175). Besides, *kopuz* as a folkloric musical instrument creates traditional *Ashik* musical poetry in Turkic-speaking communities. “*Kopuz*, a plucked lute, was the typical instrument of bards (*Ashiks*). From the ninth to eleventh centuries, Oghuz Turks were living mainly in western Central Asia to the east of Caspian Sea. From the tenth century onward, they began to move toward western territories into Iran, Azerbaijan, and Anatolia” (Soydaş 2019, 94).

The cultural significance of the *Book of Dede Korkut* is the use of *kopuz* or *saz* as a musical instrument. “*Kopuz* appears as an influential

tool that brings people closer to each other” (Saritaş 2008, 92). Alsaç claims that “Traditions are the set of values that keep the cultural memory alive. Dede Korkut’s stories are a work that increases the value of our cultural life” (Alsaç 2018, 33). Additionally, the traditional cultural heritage of Azerbaijani Turkic people in the *Book of Dede Korkut* is the Ashik musical poetry. According to Yakici, today this tradition is called *minstrel tradition*; he claims that “The bardic poetry (Ashik poetry) tradition and bards have had an important place in the history of culture in the *Book of Dede Korkut*” (Yakici 2017, 40).

Previous studies have reported that in the *Book of Dede Korkut*, *kopuz* is a very important musical instrument in the Turkic social life of all central Asia. Also, researchers have focused on the shape of *kopuz*, the development of Turkish music, and the history of this musical instrument in Turkic communities (Feyzioğlu 2006, 233-244). Moreover, another study has evaluated the characteristics of *kopuz* with Ottoman poetry in the *Book of Dede Korkut* and has claimed that *kopuz* is a national instrument of Turks and often identifying with *Dede Korkut* (Keskin 2008, 72-87). Therefore, the main purpose of this study attempts to explore the cultural heritage of *kopuz* (lute) as a folkloric musical instrument that has been transmitted from one generation to another in the Azerbaijani Turkic-speaking societies. Also, this research tries to show the root of Ashik’s (minstrel) musical poetry which goes back to the *Book of Dede Korkut*.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF *KOPUZ* (LUTE) IN THE *BOOK OF DEDE KORKUT*

In the *Book of Dede Korkut*, *kopuz* is an important folkloric musical instrument for Oghuz people because festivals and weddings hold by *kopuz*. In the stories of the *Book of Dede Korkut*, *toys* (weddings) and banquets have a great place in the social life of Oghuz tribes. “Once a year the Khan of Khans, Bayindir Khan, used to make a feast and entertain the Oghuz nobles. This year again he made a feast and had his men slaughter of horses the stallions, of camels the males, of sheep and rams” (Lewis 1974, 27). For this reason, Oghuz nobles come together at *toys*; they eat, drink, and have fun with *kopuz*. Moreover, in Oghuz tribes, *toys* are held on various occasions by *kopuz*. For example, when they return from a triumphant battle, Oghuz nobles take part in *toys*. In the story of “How Salur Kazan’s house was pillaged” (Lewis 1974, chap. 2), “Prince Kazan freed his son, his

mother and his wife. ... for seven days and seven nights there was eating and drinking. He freed forty male slaves and forty female as a thank-offering for his son Uruz” (Ibid, 57). Besides, other great *toys* are held by *kopuz* related to the story of “Bamsi Beyrek of the Grey Horse” (Ibid, chap. 3): at the wedding of Lady Chichek with Bamsi Beyrek, the Oghuz nobles celebrate this glorious ceremony for forty days and nights with *kopuz*. “For forty days and nights they held the wedding-feast. Beyrek and his warriors attained their desire. Dede Korkut came and played joyful music” (Ibid, 87). “The father of the lute playing minstrels was Dede Korkut (Korkut Ata). He was also the inventor of the stringed instruments called *kopuz*, *tanbur* and *dombra*” (Erdal 2015, 2984). In the preface of the *Book of Dede Korkut*, it is emphasized that the poet has a *kopuz* who recites poems and creates a joyful atmosphere. “Dede Korkut is considered to be the person who classifies the stories; indeed, he is a poet who plays *kopuz* and sings poetry at the end of the stories, and prays for both the hero and Oghuz tribe, and finishes the stories” (Alsaç 2018, 24-25).

In the *Book of Dede Korkut*, *kopuz* is a holy instrument among Oghuz people, which is highly respected and used to swear on it. *Kopuz* is a sacred folkloric musical instrument for Turkic people, and today *Ashiks* (minstrels) use it at weddings and ceremonies. For this reason, in ancient times, *kopuz* and its music were regarded as a means of worship rather than entertainment. Because of this situation, the musical instrument was located at the top part of the house in all times of Islam; indeed, Azerbaijanis and Anatolians hang this folklore musical instrument on the head of the house because the *kopuz* is the symbol of peace for Turkic people (Gökşen 2011, 153-154). For example, in the story of “Segrek Son of Ushun Koja” (Lewis 1974, chap. 10), when the elder brother Egrek finds his brother at sleep and takes his *kopuz* from him, the young brother Segrek wakes up and is about to strike him with a sword, but notices that he carries the *kopuz*. The narrator asserts that

The boy [Segrek] awoke with a start and leaped to his feet. He grasped his sword-hilt to strike this man [Egrek]. But he saw that he had the lute in his hand, and he said, ‘Infidel! I do not strike you, out of respect for the lute of Dede Korkut. If you were not holding the lute, I should have split you in two for my brother’s sake. He drew the lute from his hand and took it (Lewis 1974, 168).

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE *KOPUZ* (LUTE)

One of the outstanding cultural heritages of the *kopuz*, as a folkloric musical instrument, is the creation of Ashik (minstrel) musical poetry traditions in Turkic cultural societies from Central Asia to Anatolia. Azerbaijani Turkic speaking areas are the regions where folkloric musical instruments and literary traditions are most common. For this reason, the art of Ashik has an essential place in Azerbaijan. Ilshatovna (2017, 146) claims that “Ashug art forming [is] one of the fundamental, private branches of Azerbaijan folklore ... Ashug is the event of folk activity existing in ancient times”. Additionally, Turkic Ashik musical poetry is a deeply rooted musical art that expresses the common feelings and thoughts of the people. The Ashik form, which has its origins between the tenth and eleventh centuries, is one of the main branches of Azerbaijani folk literature. It is “the art of words based on the quotidian experiences of the people. It deals with a range of themes: from moral values to deeds of human beings, love, the beauty of nature and heroism” (Naghiyeva, Amirdabbaghian and Shunmugam 2019, 116).

There are four main characteristics of Ashik musical poetry. The first characteristic is that their poetic language is fluent and pure Turkish. Second, despite the simple form of Ashik music poetry, it consists of deeply philosophical, emotional, religious, social, and political concepts. Third, the main themes are courage, heroism, and love. Finally, Ashik music poetry consists of various melodic forms with frequent changes of a meter by a common language. According to Nikaeen and Oldfield (2020, 1-2):

The Ashiq art / Ashik music poetry has been the main vehicle for Azeri-language oral literature for hundreds of years and is performed by professional bards who accompany themselves on a long-necked lute called a Saz or Qopuz. ... Ashiqs took up the saz and sang two three-to-five-minute songs for the most part in duos, trading verses from one to the other.

In the stories of the *Book of Dede Korkut*, Dede Korkut (Grandfather) is a character who creates a unique Ashik musical poetry. Babayeva (2007, 140) argues that “The «holder of the kopuz», the «legend-teller», the «wandering poet» - these are indeed Dede’s roles ... he is also the name-giver! He is not only «named» in the legends, more important still, he names those whose names have become legendary”. Furthermore, through the stories, Dede Korkut accompanies himself

the *kopuz* and recites the poems spontaneously to create Ashik musical poetry. For instance, Dede Korkut, as the holder of the *kopuz*, provides appropriate names for the young men when they are proving themselves on the battlefield. In the first story of “Boghach Khan Son of Dirse Khan” (Lewis 1974, chap.1), Boghach Khan kills a strong bull. At this moment, Dede Korkut arrives and creates Ashik musical poetry by giving the name *Boghach* to the brave and unbeatable warrior of the tribe. Dede Korkut takes his *kopuz* and recites:

O Dirse Khan, make this boy a prince,
Give him a throne; well does he merit it.
Give long-necked Arab chargers to this boy
That he may ride; he is resourceful.
Give this boy ten thousand sheep from your folds
As meat for his spits; well does he merit it. (Lewis 1974, 31)

THE INVENTOR OF *ASHIK* [MINSTREL] MUSICAL POETRY

The inventor of Ashik musical poetry in Turkic cultural communities is Dede Korkut. Over the past decade, the cultural heritage of Ashik's musical poetry flourished and passed from the ancient generation to the modern period. “Dede Korkut, after whom the book is named, is the sooth-sayer high priest and bard (*ozan*) [Ashik] of the Oghuz ... it is to him that the Oghuz turn in time of trouble, for advice and practical help. At the gathering of the Oghuz, he plays his lute (*kopuz*), an instrument of which legend names him the inventor” (Lewis 1974, 12). There are some features between Dede Korkut and Ashik that depict Dede Korkut as the first person who used the *kopuz* to create Ashik's musical poetry. The first one is that Dede Korkut, as the main character of the stories like the Ashiks (minstrels), carries the *kopuz* (lute) with himself and recites in poetic and prose forms. “Dede Korkut came and played joyful music, he told stories, he declaimed, he recounted the adventures of the gallant fighters for the Faith” (Ibid, 132). The second feature is that of wandering; Dede Korkut, like the Ashiks, wanders from one tribe to the others and appears at the end of the stories, sings at weddings or when the Oghuz gentlemen are in trouble, and prays for them. “Dede Korkut came and played joyful music . . . I shall pray for you my Khan ... may your God give hope never disappointed” (Ibid, 160). In the story of “Bamsi Beyrek of the Grey Horse”, Dede Korkut carries his *kopuz* with himself, recites his poems, and proposes Lady Chichek to Bamsi Beyrek. Dede Korkut replies to Lady Chichek's brother Crazy Karchar:

By God's command and at the word of the Prophet
I have come to ask for your sister, the Lady Chichek,
Purer than the moon, lovelier than the sun,
For Bamsi Beyrek. (Lewis 1974, 66)

The last one is *Soylama* (Prose expressions in verse form): Dede Korkut by his *kopuz* recites *Soylama* and finishes stories of the book; this feature is more common in Ashiks' musical poetry when they want to conclude their songs. For example, in most of the stories, Dede Korkut recites that:

Where are the valiant princes of whom I have told?
Those who said 'The world is mine'?
Doom has taken them, earth has hidden them
Who inherits this transient world
The world to which men come, from which they go,
The world whose latter end is death? (Lewis 1974, 58)

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF *KOPUZ* [LUTE] IN THE CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Today, the tradition of telling stories by *kopuz* as a folkloric musical instrument is visible in Turkic-speaking societies. One of the cultural legacies of *kopuz* in contemporary times is the performance of Ashiks in concerts, ceremonies, weddings, and coffeehouses. For example, wedding ceremonies in the Azerbaijani Turkic-speaking communities, including the Iranian Azerbaijan regions such as provinces of East and West Azerbaijan, Zanjan and Ardabil, are held in the spring, summer, and fall seasons. The wedding ceremonies start from the day of engagement and continue in several parts, such as wedding guests and *Hanabandan Night* (wedding ceremony). On the wedding day, the presence of Ashik and guests is essential. Moreover, the wedding ceremonies usually continue for three days, and throughout the festivals, Ashik plays his *kopuz* and creates musical poetry. According to Shidfar, there are two significant places where Ashiks appear publicly: the Qəhvəxana [Coffeehouses] and the wedding celebration:

The atmosphere in the Qəhvəxana is informal and personal ... The Ashik either chooses his own songs, or members of the audience will request their favorites [music poetry] and pay the Ashik ... As the Ashik performs, he walks up and down the aisles left between the tables and chairs where the listeners sit drinking tea ... Ashiks also appear at

the festivities connected with a wedding. Although, relative to performance in Qəhvəxanas [Coffeehouses], weddings take less of an Ashik's time, they are much more lucrative (Shidfar 2015, 147-149).

In these places, Ashik musical poetry starts with *Dastan* and *Hava*. According to Oldfield and Nikaeen (2018, 171):

Hava are named musical structures that are played on the saz [kopuz]. Hava can be regional, but there is a collection of traditional hava recognized by all Azeri ashiks ... The Azeri dastan is a pros metric epic in which the story is told in speech and the dialogue is sung to a saz hava ... ashiks also sing lyrics taken from oral poetry and compose lyrics themselves; however, all ashik songs will be sung to a hava.

Karabudak (2019, 147) declares that “The Ashiq tradition, which constitutes the most important asset of our cultural heritage, is an art that has been shaped through the experience of people for centuries”. Thus, Ashik musical poetry traditions, as a cultural heritage of humanity, flourished and became popular between Central Asia to Anatolia.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the cultural significance of *kopuz* (lute) as a folkloric musical instrument that created Ashik musical poetry in the Turkic-speaking communities. *Kopuz* was the sacred and significant musical instrument in the *Book of Dede Korkut* used in different festivals and ceremonies. Dede Korkut was the inventor of Ashik musical poetry because he was the holder of the *kopuz*; a wandering poet, he concluded the stories with *Soylama*. Moreover, the language of Ashik (minstrel) musical poetry was pure Turkish with different melodic patterns, and their themes were philosophical, political, emotional, and heroic. Today, the cultural legacy of *kopuz* is the art of Ashik musical poetry, as a cultural heritage of Azerbaijani Turkic people, which flourished from the *Book of Dede Korkut* till the performances in various ceremonies such as concerts, weddings, and coffeehouses.

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