Turkish Lullabies

Lullabies and other Women's Songs in the Turkish Village of Akçaeniş

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ABSTRACT

The available evidence indicates that lullabies across cultures are perceptually distinct from other song genres. The question of interest in the present study was whether lullabies from a remote agricultural village in Turkey were distinct from other women's song genres, specifically from laments and wedding songs. Observation and analysis of women's songs from this village revealed that melodies were largely interchangeable between laments and lullabies. Song lyrics were also similar across these genres, with themes of sleep and loss appearing in lullabies and laments. The same melodies often appeared in wedding songs, but the lyrics of this genre contrasted with those of lullabies and laments.

LULLABIES IN THE TURKISH VILLAGE OF AKÇAENIŞ

INTRODUCTION

Lullabies, which are songs for soothing infants or promoting sleep, are found in every culture and historical period (Trehub & Trainor, 1998). It remains unclear, however, whether their essence resides in the lyrics, the melody, the performing style, or some combination thereof. Musically untrained adults readily distinguish sung performances of foreign lullabies from non-lullabies that are matched on tempo and culture of origin (Trehub, Unyk, & Trainor, 1993), which implies that verbal cues may not be critical to lullaby identification. Adults also judge synthesized foreign lullabies to be simpler than non-lullabies (Unyk, Trehub, Trainor, & Schellenberg, 1992), which implies that lullabies have distinctive melodic features. To date, however, attempts to pinpoint those features have been unsuccessful. For example, the foreign lullabies in the aforementioned study (Unyk et al., 1992) did not differ from the non-lullabies in median pitch, mean interval size, pitch range, number of contour changes, proportion of descending intervals, or phrase duration.

According to Porter's (2001) "lullaby" entry in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 2nd Edition,* "like the lament...the lullaby is usually (though not exclusively) sung solo by women and displays musical characteristics that are often archaic, such as a descending melodic line, portamento effects, stylized representations of sighing or weeping, and non-stanzaic text lines." In other words, musical structure, textual structure *and* performing style are thought to contribute jointly to this musical genre. Porter raises the issue, moreover, of structural and performance parallels between lullabies and laments, both of which are performed largely by female singers, even in societies that exclude women from culturally valued spheres of musical activity (Sakata, 1987).

Lullabies have received relatively little scholarly attention within the domain of music, perhaps because of the historical devaluation of women's music, the common reliance on male informants, and the private context of lullaby performances (Sakata, 1987). In contrast to mothers in traditional cultures, those in contemporary industrialized societies sing more play songs than lullabies (Trehub & Trainor, 1998), limiting the opportunities for studying lullaby performances.

In an attempt to observe the use of lullabies in one such traditional culture, the senior author, an experimental psychologist by training, spent several weeks in a small rural village in Turkey in 1995 accompanied by a bilingual Turkish scholar who functioned as interpreter and translator. The village was selected for its relative isolation from modern Turkish society as well as from Western images and music. The principal goal of the visit was to determine whether the lullabies sung to infants in this remote village constituted a distinct song category. Information about the village and its inhabitants at the time of the visit provides some context for its musical practices.

LIFE IN THE VILLAGE OF AKÇAENIŞ

Akçaeniş is located in the Taurus Mountains of Antalya Province, not far from the Mediterranean Sea. In 1995, residents of this village, who numbered well under 200, were subsistence peasants, except for one family whose greater means stemmed from business interests outside the village. The scenes in Figures 1 and 2 provide a glimpse of the village. Housing was very basic, with no indoor plumbing (with the exception of the single family of greater means) and sporadic electricity (roughly 1-2 hours daily). One consequence was that recorded music was unavailable through radio or other media, which limited external musical influences.

Figure 1. Scene from Akçaeniş illustrating typical housing.

Figure 2. Scene from Akçaeniş depicting goats that provided yogurt and small quantities of meat for some of the villagers.

Each family unit consisted of parents, unmarried children, and married male children with spouses and offspring, all of whom lived under the same modest roof. This extended family also shared meals from communal dishes with individual utensils (large spoons, primarily), which facilitated the transmission of bacteria and viruses. Living conditions have probably improved in the intervening years, especially with the recent introduction of small-scale eco-tourism in agricultural villages such as this one.

In 1995, most children were receiving 5-6 years of schooling, which required busing to another village. Although adults in this village may have had comparable schooling, neither they nor the children were observed reading or writing at any time. Reading materials were seen only in the “prosperous” household, which had a few books on display. There were no medical facilities within the village or nearby, which probably contributed to an elevated incidence of illness and disability. Nevertheless, villagers exhibited few signs of discontent with their lot in life. On the contrary, overt expressions of joy were common, as were expressions of other emotions.

The residents of Akçaeniş belong in faith and heritage to the Alevi sect of Islam, which combines elements of mystical (Sufi) Islam, Shi`ism, and aspects arising from the historic rivalry between Ottoman and Safavid Empires in Anatolia (Zeidan, 1999). The Alevis, a significant minority in Turkey, have often been victims of persecution by the Sunni Muslim majority. In general, Alevi religious knowledge is transmitted orally, with interpretations of the Qu’ran being looser than is the case for Sunni Muslims.

At the time of the visit, villagers participated in faith practices such as Alevi hymns (*nefes*) and dances and the *cem*, a ceremonial ritual that commemorates important events in Alevi history (Zeidan, 1999). At no time, however, was solitary or communal prayer observed, perhaps because of the absence of a resident religious leader. Instead, a leader from another community visited periodically.

Akçaeniş society operates along patriarchal lines. Upon the death of a family head, his assets, typically consisting of a humble abode and separate piece of agricultural land, are divided among male descendants. The result is diminishing assets for successive generations. Young women from the village marry men from other villages and become part of their husband’s family unit. Similarly, new wives who come to Akçaeniş from other villages become part of their in-laws’ household. As in other patriarchal societies, women gain status by bearing male children, who will ultimately be responsible for the multi-generational family unit. Men and older boys in many households were served meals first, after which the women and children shared the remnants of those meals. Perhaps because of the unusual inclinations of the senior author (e.g., reading, writing, observing, using equipment), she was often pressured to take her meals with the men.

Children in this relatively impoverished village were highly valued. As one villager noted, “Each baby that is born is a source of joy.” Mothers assumed the principal duties of infant care, assisted by older children and adult female relatives. The prevailing belief, however, was that mothers required rest for several weeks after childbirth, which led female relatives to provide care for mother, baby and other children, if any.

CHALLENGES OF OBSERVING AND RECORDING LULLABIES

A village elder, shown in Figure 3, hosted the senior author in his household and assumed the role of principal informant. Despite the author's explicitly stated interest in music for infants, the informant repeatedly directed attention to music that was venerated by the community. For example, he invited the best practitioners in the village to perform traditional Alevi songs. When pressed about women's music, he invited female elders to sing wedding songs and, occasionally, lullabies.

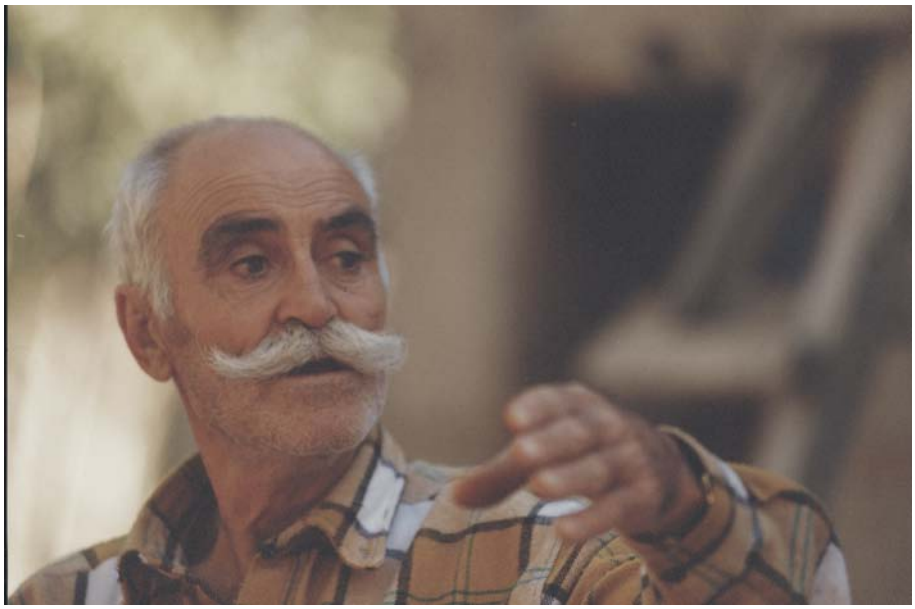

Figure 3. Male elder who served as host and principal informant for the senior author.

The senior author's assistance with infant care provided potential opportunities to observe performances of lullabies without the scrutiny of other villagers. It soon became clear, however, that mothers were unwilling or unable to sing lullabies unless it was an appropriate time for their infant to sleep. At such times, the mother sat on the floor with the supine infant on her outstretched legs. After covering the infant's face with a thin scarf, she began rocking her legs from side to side and singing. Within several seconds, the mother lifted a corner of the scarf to reveal a sleeping infant, which prompted the discontinuation of singing.

With the passage of time and burgeoning friendships, the senior author became more insistent about requests for lullabies, especially from female elders (see Figure 4). Even such elders found it difficult to sing in the absence of an infant. What they did instead was to assume the usual position of maternal lullaby singer (i.e., on the floor with outstretched legs), using a pillow or other prop in place of the absent baby. At such times, the singing of traditional lullabies had profound consequences not only on the singer but also on the men and women within earshot, all of whom typically became tearful after hearing a few phrases.

Figure 4. Female elder who provided insight into women and their songs in Akçaeniş.

Digital recordings were made whenever possible, a situation that depended largely on the availability of electricity for charging the batteries of the recording equipment. Translations were done immediately after the visit by the late Seyfi Karabaş, a professor of folk literature at Ankara University who served as interpreter during the visit. The second author, a musician with extensive training in theory and performance, transcribed the recordings into conventional musical notation.

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES ABOUT SONG GENRES

Alevi songs clearly had the highest status. They were performed by men, often while playing the saz or *bağlama*, a traditional stringed instrument with frets (Bryant, 2005; Markoff, 1995). Only three such instruments were observed in the village. Although men claimed that women were free to play the saz, no woman was observed to do so. Akçaeniş villagers also venerated Alevi poetry and folk tales, non-musical forms whose animated performances by male elders captivated young and old alike. Although lullabies had lower status than other song forms, they were nevertheless valued by both men and women.

The most valued forms of oral performance were part of communal religious or ceremonial practice. By contrast, lullabies typically occurred within the intimate context of caregiver-infant interactions. As noted, however, some elderly women sung traditional lullabies in response to the senior author's requests. Although villagers claimed that men could compose laments, this genre seemed to belong primarily to Akçaeniş women. Laments were sung during an overnight vigil with the deceased that was restricted to women, but men could remain in nearby rooms if they wished to do so.

OVERLAP BETWEEN LULLABIES AND LAMENTS

Villagers were unanimous in their designation of specific songs as laments, lullabies, or other song types. Akçaeniş lullabies and laments differed in their function — one for soothing young children, the other for mourning. From a musical perspective, however, the two genres were largely indistinguishable, which may account for villagers' designation of many songs as *lament lullabies*. One woman, G. A., explained that these songs were used interchangeably: they were "sung as lullabies and not simply laments" (translation). Some singers maintained that the sad aspects of these songs were suppressed in lullaby contexts, but no notable differences were observed, with the lullaby and lament performances of individual singers being nearly identical. In this article, we follow the usage of Akçaeniş women in our designation or classification of songs as *lament lullabies* or other song genres.

Figure 5 shows a lament lullaby sung by F.C., and Figure 6 shows a lament sung by the same singer. The songs were transposed to C major/A minor for ease of comparison. Pitches are approximate, and musical meter and rhythm are free. *Tenuto* markings indicate slightly longer duration. Tempo is moderately paced unless otherwise noted. Brackets demarcate phrases. Grace notes and mordents indicate embellishments, with mordents representing an exaggerated, trill-like vibrato.

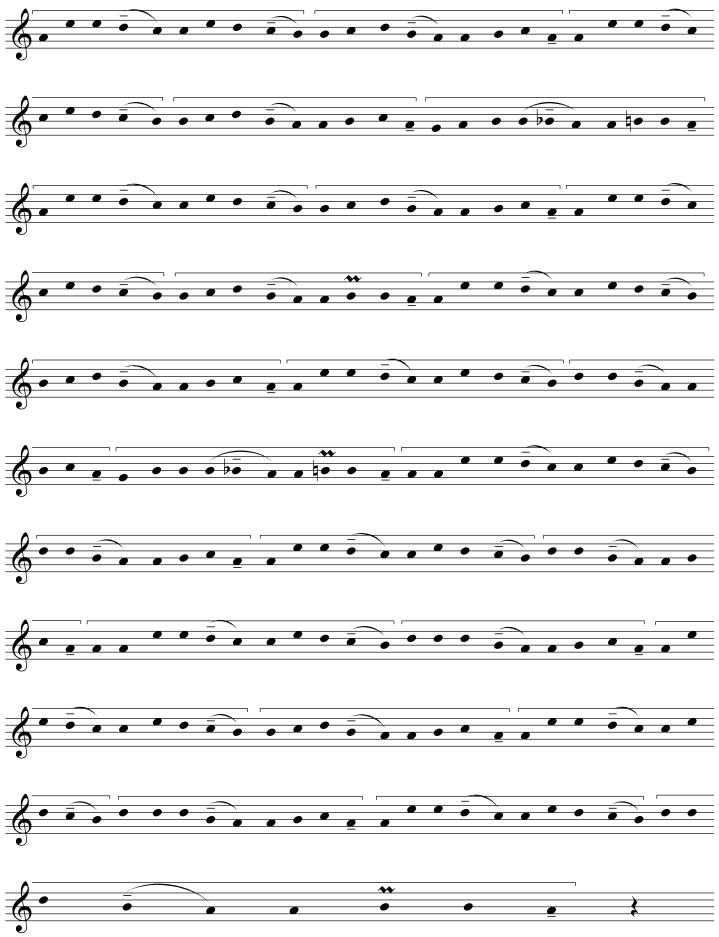

Figure 5. Transcription of a lament lullaby sung by F.C.

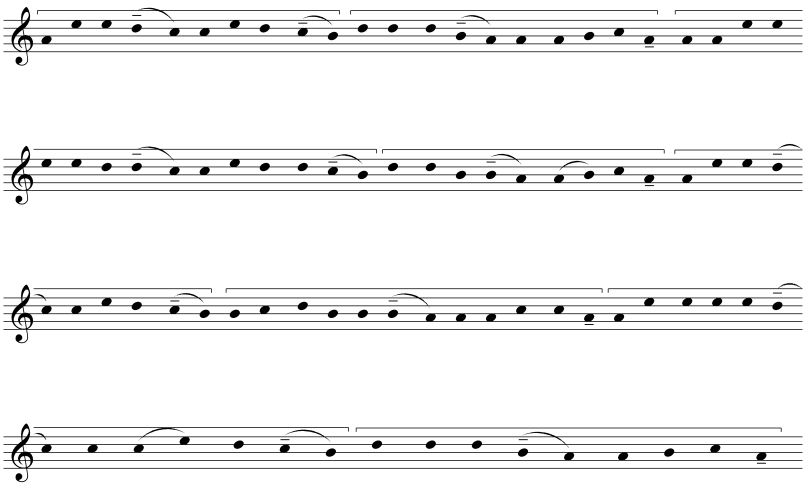

Figure 6. Transcription of a lament sung by F.C. Tempo is slower for this song than for other songs.

Despite subtle differences between these two songs — the lament lullaby for an infant audience, and the lament for an audience of grieving women — there are substantial similarities. The opening melodic phrase of the lament lullaby (Figure 5), or the A phrase, is identical to that of the lament (Figure 6). This particular phrase occurs again throughout both songs, being modified only to accommodate the changing syllabic pattern of the lyrics. Otherwise, the overall melodic structure in both songs is unchanged.

The second or B phrases of both songs are also strikingly similar. Alterations in the lament arise from the contrasting lyric patterns (e.g., following the tie in phrase 2 of the lament lullaby, the note *A* occurs only once, whereas in phrase 2 of the lament, this same note is repeated because the lyrics contain an additional syllable), but the B phrases are largely the same. As with the A phrases in the lament lullaby and lament, the B phrases repeat throughout both songs, with minor adaptations for changes in the pattern of lyrics.

The lyrics, which were sung in a regional Turkish dialect, are presented in English translation in Table 1 for the lament lullaby and in Table 2 for the lament. Although the lyrics of these songs differ, both have melancholic aspects and themes of sleep. From the standpoint of lyrical or verbal thematic material, it is difficult to differentiate the lament lullaby from the lament.

Table 1. Translation of lyrics to F.C.'s lament lullaby (Figure 5)

To its embroidery, to its embroidery, the slope of --- (unintelligible)
You wore me out my --- (unintelligible) beloved baby on the slope of the Kozan mountain.
Sleep, my beloved baby, sleep, the other slope of the Kozan mountain.
I went and looked and it was partridges' footprints, the real statement of the enemies.
Oh, my little one, you caused us great grief.
To the island of the Kozan mountain, giants descend to its room.
My pomegranate, beloved baby was left on the branch.
I didn't tell his father; sleep, my beloved baby, sleep.
I weave a kilim with motifs; my relatives (paternal female) are badgering me.
A baby in seven years; oh fickle fate, do you begrudge me that?
Move me dark-fated tribe, move; put the sacrificial animals on the ground.
Protect my pomegranate baby on the branch; sleep my little baby, sleep.

Table 2. Translation of lyrics to F.C.'s lament (Figure 6)

--- (unintelligible) is a stork.
The leg of the stork is a henna-smeared stick.
What's called separation is a shirt of fire.
Sleep my little one, sleep.
I made your bed near the sleeping mats.
I spread the sequined scarf over your face.
You slept sweetly until morning.
Sleep my little one, sleep.

F.C. seems to incorporate a folk legend in her lament lullaby. Her song contains references to embroidery and weaving, as if drawing parallels of her sung story to the completion of a rug or tapestry (analogous, perhaps, to the use of *yarn* for story). She sings of her baby wearing her out on the slope of the Kozan mountain, referring, possibly, to the burden of carrying the infant up the incline. On the opposite slope of the mountain, they encountered danger or adversity symbolized by the footprints of partridges. She declares the infant to be responsible for a grief she and others experienced there, after which the beloved baby was left on a branch. It is unclear how this development relates to the rest of the tale. Was the child forgotten or abandoned because of the pain he or she caused? Was the mother exhausted by an ailing child, who died and was left behind after a period of mourning?

The song concludes with the singer sharing the anguish of a 7-year period of being barren, which is exacerbated by pressure from her husband's family. She invokes a sacrificial act to protect the baby left on the branch. She mourns its loss and longs for another to take its place. The phrase, "sleep, my beloved baby, sleep" is sung three times, but it is unclear whether this sentiment is directed to the imagined baby on her lap or to the mythical baby in the legend. The mournful lyrics may provide a metaphor for the challenges of infancy, like the falling cradle in *Rockabye Baby* or the negative images in some lullabies from other cultures (Trehub & Trainor, 1998).

The lyrics of F.C.'s lament are considerably simpler. Four of the eight lines refer to sleep or sleeping, as in a lullaby. The sixth phrase, "I spread the sequined scarf over your face," seems to refer to the Akçaeniş practice of spreading a lightweight cloth or scarf over the infant's face in preparation for sleep. The third line, "what's called

separation is a shirt of fire," may refer to the pain and separation occasioned by the death of a loved one. If so, this would be the only verbal indication that the song involves mourning. The most tangible clue to the functional context of these songs is F.C.'s style of performance, which involves a slower tempo and more mournful character for the lament.

To further illustrate this point, compare the lyrics in Table 3, involving a lullaby sung by G.A., with those of the lament in Table 2 sung by F.C. The first three lines of both songs are remarkably similar, leaving the impression that the two singers were beginning the same song. Whereas the lament sung by F.C. proceeds to thematic elements of sleep, G.A.'s lullaby speaks of grief and loss. She sings of a "young one" lost "to the arrow of fate" on the "15th of the new moon." The lines, "I couldn't wear it" (referring to the shirt of fire), "you don't have a mother," and "my pains are not deserting me" seem to suggest that the mother is having difficulty bearing the grief resulting from the loss of her child. She emphasizes that her child was loved and declares repeatedly that she is in mourning.

Table 3. Translation of lyrics to G.A.'s lullaby (Figure 7)

A yellow stork at the peak of the mountain.
They have given him a stick smeared with henna.
What they call death is a shirt of fire.
I couldn't wear it; praised be those who wore it.
I have borne her to and fro on my right and my left.
I lost her on the 15th of the new moon.
I am in mourning.
... (unintelligible)
Your grandfathers loved you... (unintelligible)
I yielded a young one to the arrow of fate.
You don't have a mother; your sister is worried.
I am in mourning... (unintelligible)
Your grandfathers used to love you with all their heart.
... (unintelligible)
My pains are not deserting me.
I am in mourning.
I am the Arab of... (unintelligible)

As can be seen in Figures 5 and 6, samples of contrasting song genres from an individual singer were strikingly similar. Comparisons of Figures 7 and 8 (translations unavailable for Figure 8) reveal less striking but still obvious melodic similarities. It is likely that the shift of the tonal center to *A minor* within the first few phrases of Figure 7 originated from the singer's failure to maintain a stable pitch center. In both lullabies the A phrase begins with a stepwise ascending figure, followed by a sustained note with an incomplete upper neighbor, a descent of a major third, and ending with a completed upper neighbor tone. The B phrase of each song follows a similar pattern: a short ascent, followed by a sustained note with an incomplete upper neighbor, and closing with an embellished descent into a final sustained note.

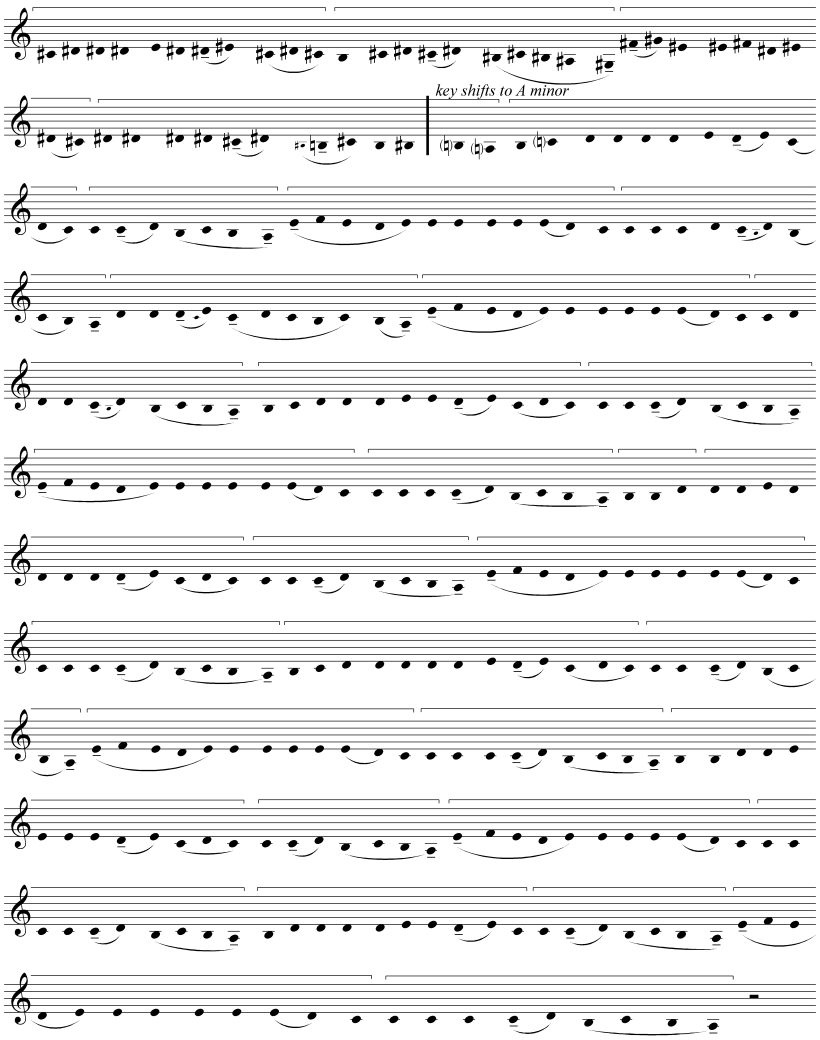

Figure 7. Transcription of a lullaby sung by G.A.

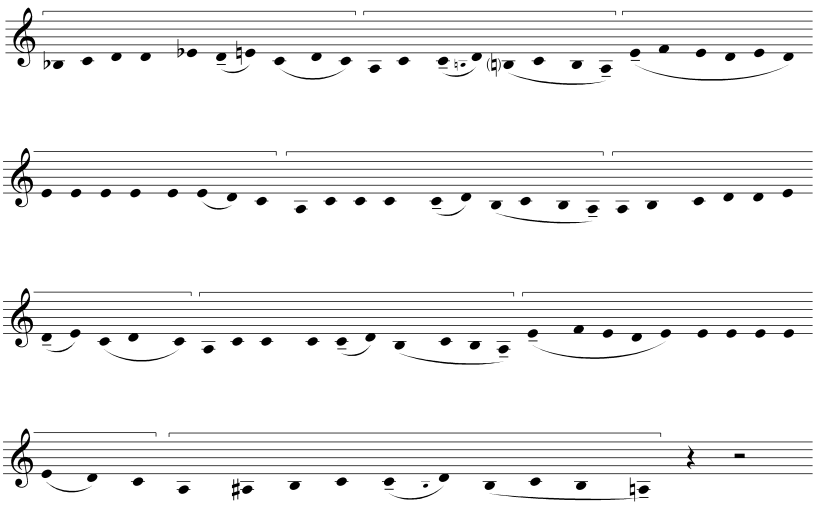

Figure 8. Transcription of a second lullaby sung by G.A.

Unlike the songs of F.C. (Figures 5 and 6) that consisted largely of two repeating phrases, which we label A B A B, the songs of G.A. (Figures 7 and 8) were comprised of three main phrases, which we label A B A' B. This is most easily observed in Figure 8, which contains less variation than the song in Figure 7. Nevertheless, the pattern can be traced loosely in Figure 7 as well. It should be noted that both singers occasionally modified a phrase so that it did not adhere strictly to these patterns.

Although the songs of one singer sometimes resembled those of another — compare Figure 8,sung by G.A., with Figure 9, a lullaby sung by a third woman, M.C. — individual singers typically recycled or reused the same melodies with different lyrical content. Aspects of these melodies were often but not always individually distinctive. The practice of reusing melodies was common in Akçaeniş, even among men, yet the villagers typically seemed unaware of the melodic similarities. If the lyrics of a song were different, they insisted that the song was different, resisting suggestions that the tunes were similar or identical. The reuse of melodies for different songs is not uncommon in Western cultures. For example, *The Alphabet Song*, *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, and *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep* are all sung to the tune of the traditional French song, *Ah! vous dirai-je Maman,* yet children and adults who sing those songs are often unaware that these songs share a single tune.

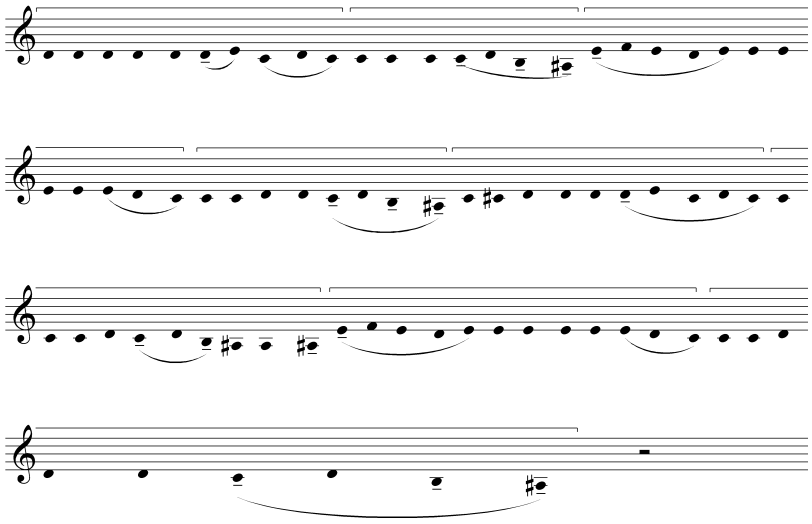

Figure 9. Transcription of a lullaby sung by M.C.

WEDDING SONGS

A related genre of women's songs in Akçaeniş is the wedding song or "henna night song." "Henna night" refers to the last night that a bride spends in her family home before her wedding and subsequent departure to her new husband's village. The occasion is marked by a ritual in which the bride's hands are dyed with henna. Although weddings are festive occasions in many respects, elements of sadness and uncertainty for the bride and her family arise from the bride's impending departure to a village where she will be at the mercy of a little known husband-to-be and his family. Accordingly, family members and friends serenade her with henna night songs to make her cry.

The lyrics of a henna night song sung by F.C., the singer of the lament lullaby from Figure 5, are shown in Table 4. The words indicate the unknown road the bride will embark upon the following morning “to the light of the waning moon” and the singer’s wish that the occasion brings happiness. The singer repeatedly expresses hope that the bride will be treated well by her new family: “may your new place have a kind tongue.” The song also conveys the impact of the bride’s departure on her own family. She will be missed by relatives, and the home of her youth will show signs that she is gone. The singer refers to the clover “that grew to the rooftops” and asks “where is my little one,” seemingly reminiscing about her daughter’s childhood, expressing wonder and wistfulness at her adulthood and imminent departure.

Table 4. Translation of lyrics to F.C.’s henna night song

She embarks on an unknown road.
To the light of the waning moon.
Send word to her (maternal) uncle.
My daughter, may your henna bring you happiness.
May your new place have a kind tongue.
Clover in front of our house that grew to the rooftops.
Clover, who will reap you when my young one is gone?
May your henna give you happiness.
May your new place have a kind tongue.
Oleaster in front of the house; its branches are heavy and bowed.
Where is my little one?
May your henna give you happiness.
May your new place have a kind tongue.

The function of henna night songs was distinct from that of laments and lament lullabies, and these wedding songs were rarely sung outside their traditional context. The melodies of these songs, however, were often borrowed from other genres. Figure 10 shows the melody of a henna night song sung by F.C. The tune is easily recognizable as the one from the lament lullaby in Figure 5. The A phrase of each song is identical, and after a few repetitions, the B phrase in Figure 10 becomes identical to the B phrase in Figure 5.

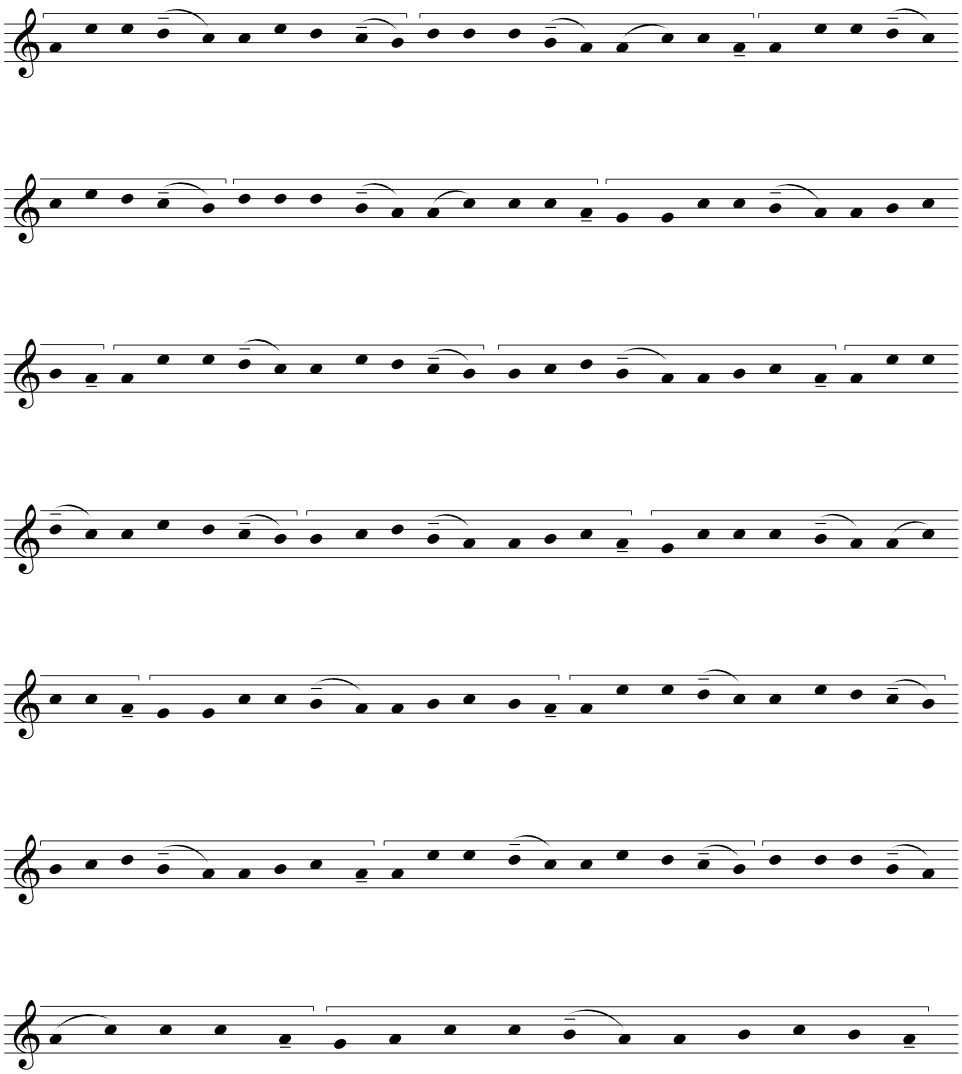

Figure 10. Transcription of a henna night song sung by F.C.

RHYTHMS OF AKÇAENIŞ WOMEN'S SONGS

In addition to simple melodies with modest embellishments and basic forms, Akçaeniş women's songs had free rhythms, which are difficult to represent in Western notation. Without a "standard" or model performance, it is impossible to ascertain whether the absence of a discernible metric framework is characteristic of these song types or resulted from imperfect performances. All indications were that the rhythms were linked to the syllabic pattern of lyrics, which followed a general form within each phrase. As can be seen in Figure 6, phrase 1 begins with three moderately paced notes followed by a slightly longer or held note (indicated with a *tenuto* marking) that is slurred across a stepwise descent. The latter note of the slur (i.e., the lower of the two pitches) is shorter in duration. Three more moderately paced notes follow, and the phrase ends with another held note tied to a stepwise descent (again, the latter note being shorter in duration). In phrase 3, the next A phrase of the same example, there are seven moderately paced notes followed by a held note tied to a stepwise descent. Then there are four moderately paced notes, followed again by a held note tied to a stepwise descent. What emerges, then, is a pattern of moderately paced notes followed by a held note tied to a stepwise descent.

This type of rhythmic patterning seemed to be typical of Akçaeniş women's music. As can be seen in Figure 6 (and, for most of F.C.'s songs, see also Figures 5 and 10), the rhythmic pattern for the A phrase could be described as follows: moderate, held note with slur to shorter note; moderate, held note with slur to shorter note. Similarly, F.C.'s B phrases could be described as follows: moderate, held note with slur to shorter note; moderate, final held note.

Alternatively, the rhythm of G.A.'s sung phrases could be described as follows:

A Phrase: moderate, held note with slur to shorter note;
moderate [upper neighbor] slur
B Phrase: moderate, held note with slur to shorter note;
moderate embellishment to final held note
A^1 Phrase: held note with slur to shorter note (held note often includes embellishment);
moderate (including slur in two notes preceding the final note of the phrase)

The exact duration of the moderate rhythms depended on the syllabic pattern of the lyrics. For example, they may have closely resembled quarter notes, eighth notes, or dotted eighths and sixteenths. It is possible, however, that the duration of the held note was determined by individual singers, who were generally consistent in the duration of their held notes.

MELODIES OF AKÇAENIŞ WOMEN'S SONGS

The melodies of Akçaeniş women's songs were relatively simple. The vocal range of their songs rarely exceeded a perfect fifth, and the motion was mainly unison or stepwise, as can be seen in Figure 11, which depicts intervals compiled from several lullabies. In all cases, the melodies consisted largely of phrase repetition, and phrases ended with a descending contour. Some phrases, such as those in the lament lullaby shown in Figure 5, began with an ascent and ended with a descent. Others, such as phrase 3 in the lullaby shown in Figure 7, started on a higher pitch and descended gradually throughout the phrase.

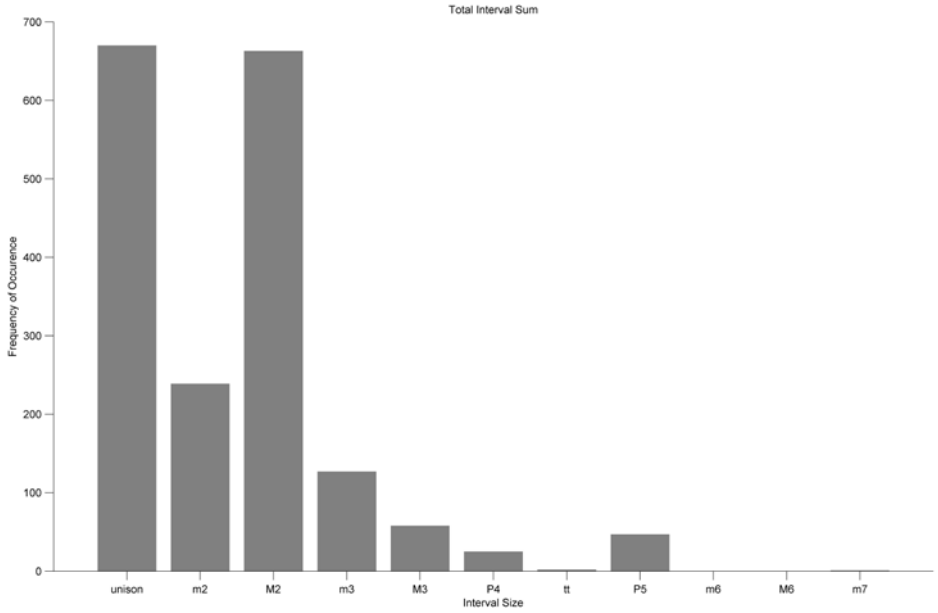

Figure 11. Frequency of occurrence of intervals across several lullabies.

Singers often added modest embellishments to their basic melodies including slow turns, short, incomplete neighbors, and exaggerated, trill-like vibrato. At times, the same embellishments were present in each statement of a phrase. At other times, they were added as variations to phrase repetitions. For example, most of G.A.'s A^1 phrases (see phrase 3 in Figure 8) began with a turn-like figure, and her B phrases (see phrase 2 in Figure 8) ended with a similar embellishment. Less frequently, G.A. added short, decorative notes resembling incomplete upper neighbors (see grace notes in Figures 7 and 8) that gave slight contrast to individual melodic phrases. F.C. occasionally added an exaggerated vibrato to her notes, as shown by the mordents in Figure 5. As noted, Akçaeniş women's songs use basic forms. For example, F.C.'s songs usually followed an A B A B phrase pattern, whereas the phrases of G.A.'s songs repeated in an A B A' B form. These simple, repeating forms and others like them were common to all of the Akçaeniş women's songs.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the question that motivated the present study, are the lullabies of Akçaeniş distinct from other women's song categories? On the basis of the aforementioned observations and analyses, there is little indication that Akçaeniş lullabies constitute a perceptually or structurally distinct genre. This situation is in marked contrast to the reported distinctiveness of lullabies in other parts of the world (Trehub et al., 1993; Unyk et al., 1992). In this village, however, melodies were used interchangeably between laments and lullabies, providing legitimacy for local women's characterization of lullabies as *lament lullabies*. Lullabies and laments also contained strikingly similar verbal themes. Although henna night songs often involved the same melodies, their lyrics contrasted with those of the two other song categories. The similarities across song genres were all the more remarkable in the performances of individual singers.

Recycling or reuse of melodies has been observed in many other cultures, including those in the Western European tradition, but the extent of reuse was remarkable in this village. In fact, the most common lullabies, laments, and henna songs shared a single melody. Although the melodic similarities are immediately apparent to listeners like the senior author who do not understand Turkish, there was no indication that the villagers were aware of those similarities. Instead, they categorized songs largely on the basis of their lyrics, which were thematically distinct only for henna songs. Despite the overlapping verbal themes of traditional lullabies and laments, these songs were conceptually separate by virtue of their highly contrastive contexts of usage.

The songs performed by Akçaeniş women — laments, lullabies and henna night songs — had simple melodic forms and free rhythms. Their relatively small pitch range, descending melodic contours and repetition seem to be universal or near-universal features of lullabies (Porter, 2001; Unyk et al., 1992). Finally, although the visit to the remote village of Akçaeniş provided a glimpse into the form and function of their women's music, much about their music and their thoughts remained mysterious. The words of an elderly Akçaeniş woman provide an example of such mystery: "Your insides blow like wind with a lullaby." Perhaps she was referring to emotions stirred deep within — memories of love and loss and the hope of life anew, all captured in a simple melody sung as freely as the wind blows.

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