



KÖROĞLU II. PERFORMANCE ASPECTS

Bards usually perform the *Köroğlu/Goroqli* epic to the accompaniment of a string instrument, such as the *sāz*, the *dambura*, or the *dutār*. In some traditions, *Köroğlu/Goroqli* is an entirely separate music genre whose performance requires a demanding training in vocal technique and memory. In [Badakšān](#), for example, the interpreter of *Goroqli* produces a distinctive sound quality in a “low and guttural voice” (Sakata, p. 57). In contemporary Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan, singers specialized in performing *Goroqli* are called *Goroqli-kvān* (Reichl, pp. 326-27), *Gorqli-kvān* (Sakata, pp. 97-98, 165), or *Goroqli-gu* (Slobin, pp. 125-26). The distinction between an *āšeq* and a *Kuroqli-kvān*, whose “duty is to know by heart all the *mejles* [episodes],” was already identified by Chodźko (pp. 13-14), though this distinction does not seem to apply to Khorasan and contemporary Azarbaijan.

Nowadays, in order to memorize each episode (Pers. *majles*, *šāk*; Turk. *qol*) of the [epic](#) a singer also resorts to literary sources, preserved in handwritten notes or inexpensive imprints. In Khorasan, a *baḳši* often owns a copy of *Kolliyāt-e dāstān-e Kuroqli* ([FIGURE 1](#)), the 1990s reprint of which (22 × 14.5 cm, 168 pages) has a wrapper, printed on the back of a commercial advertisement. This printed version of *Köroğlu* comprises a collection of Azeri Turkish quatrains (*qoşma*) alternating with a Persian prose narrative (cf. Chodźko’s original manuscript, see i, above). Karl Reichl (pp. 324-25) and Mark Slobin (p. 109) have described how during a performance the bard adapts his



prose to the language of his audience, though he retains Azeri Turkish as the language of the poetry. While the prosimetric form is prevalent in some of the traditions found in Azarbaijan, Turkmenistan, or Uzbekistan, other traditions, such as those in Kazakhstan and Armenia, only use verses (Reichl, p. 324).



باغ بسله یوپ قیزیل گولین درمه سین دریب سونرا یایلق اوسته سرمه سین
مطلبه گلمشم ، مطلب ویزمه سین سیغار ویروب مصری قلنج تویلا یام



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کور اوغلی یام ، نازلی یارا گلمشم گرلا گوزلاری سه چوب بویلا یام .
سوز تمام اولدی . عرب پاشا کور ارغلینی تانیدی ، نه مطلبه ده



FIGURE 1. “Kuroğli va qahramānlār,” after Kolliāt-e dāstān-e Kuroğli, p. 136. Courtesy of Butler Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

The traditional venues for the performance of the *Köroğlu/Goroğli* epic are life-cycle celebrations, private gatherings, and teahouses (see ČĀY). In Azarbaijan and northern Khorasan, from the 17th century up to the Islamic Revolution of 1978, teahouses played a pivotal role in the diffusion and the preservation of the epic. The performance of each *majles* could span several hours or days. In of K̄vārazm (see CHORASMIA), for example, a *baḵši* requested seventeen days to perform an entire cycle (Reichl, p. 323).

The interpreter of *Köroğlu* uses different melody types for his performance as he accompanies himself on his instrument. Most melodies accommodate strophes organized in quatrains, with each line comprised of 8 or 11 syllables. The strophes are usually separated by an interlude in which the instrumental rendition of the vocal melody is performed. In Khorasan, the *Köroğlu* tune is characterized by a descending contour from the highest to the lowest note, a large range that often exceeds an octave, and a final resolution that resembles a plagal cadence. Moreover, in Khorasan, the *Köroğlu* tune can also be performed as a purely instrumental piece to accompany a traditional Iranian wrestling match (*košti*), and the musicians (*‘āseq*; in Khorasan the word is used as a synonym of *moṭreb* and therefore does not mean bard, as it does in Azarbaijan) play a conical oboe (*sornā*) and a double-headed cylindrical drum (*dohol*).

The martial or heroic character of some *Köroğlu* tunes is reflected in the titles, particularly in their adjectives. In Azarbaijan, the tunes are called *JangiKöroğlu* (“the warrior Köroğlu”), *Dali Köroğlu* (“angry Köroğlu”), or *Qânli Köroğlu* (“bloody Köroğlu”), while in Khorasan the *baḵši* calls them “warlike” (Pers. *razmi*).

In the modal system known as the *dastgāh* of Māhur, *Köroğlu* is also the name of a melodic unit (*guša*), which comprises an instrumental dance piece (*reng*) in 6/8 meter. This *guša* is sometimes performed as an opening instrumental piece (*pišdarāmad*) or as a closing *reng* by a soloist or an ensemble. It is mentioned in the traditional corpus (*radif*) published by Musā Maʿrufi in 1963 and in the new edition of the repertory of Mirzā ʿAbdollah (1843-1918), edited by Jean During. In 1967, Stephen Blum recorded a version of Nur ʿAli



[Borumand](#) (1905-1977), which is available in the University of Illinois Archive of Ethnomusicology.

For a music sample, see [‘Āšeq Jonun](#).

For a music sample, see [Gurughli](#).

For a music sample, see [Köroğlu \(1\)](#).

For a music sample, see [Köroğlu \(2\)](#).

For a music sample, see [The Köroğlu Story: an Excerpt](#).

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